

ALIN-KYAN

THE MANUAL OF LIGHT

AN EXPOSITION OF THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING

By

MAHĀTHERA LEDI SAYADAW,
Aggamahāpaṇḍita, D. Litt.

Translated into English by
U TIN U (MYAUNG)

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Dhammapada

- 190 Yo ca Buddhañ ca Dhammañ ca
Saṅghañ ca saraṇaṃ gato
cattāri ariyasaccāni
sammappaññāya passati:
- 191 Dukkhaṃ dukkhasamuppādaṃ
dukkhassa ca atikkamaṃ,
ariyañ c'atthaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ
dukkhūpasama-gāmiṇaṃ,
- 192 Etaṃ kho saraṇaṃ khemaṃ
etaṃ saraṇaṃ uttamaṃ
etaṃ saraṇaṃ āgama
sabbadukkhā pamuccati.

190, 191 He who seeks refuge in the Buddha
the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, he
who sees with right knowledge the
Four Noble Truths – Suffering, the
Cause of Suffering, the Cessation of
Suffering and the Noble Eightfold
Path which leads to the Cessation of
Suffering;

192 This indeed is the refuge secure; this
indeed is the refuge supreme.
Seeking such refuge one is released
from all suffering.

ALIN-KYAN

The Manual of Light

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

which have been translated into English
by various hands:

Vipassanā Dīpanī	The Manual of Insight
Paṭṭhānuddesa Dīpanī	The Buddhist Philosophy of Relations
Sammādiṭṭhi Dīpanī	The Manual of Right Views
Niyāma Dīpanī	The Manual of Cosmic Order
Catusacca Dīpanī	The Manual of the Four Noble Truths
Bodhipakkhiya Dīpanī	The Manual of the Factors leading to Enlightenment
Maggaṅga Dīpanī	The Manual of the Constituents of the Noble Path
Alin-Kyan (in part only)	An Exposition of Five Kinds of Light
Appendix	
i. Five Questions on Kamma	
ii. Anattānisamṣa – A Concise Description of the Advantages arising out of The Realisation of Anatta	

The English translations of all the above mentioned works have now been printed in a single volume: 'The Manuals of Buddhism' and published by: The Deputy Director, at the Religious Affairs Dept. Press, Yegu, Kaba-Aye P.O., Rangoon, Burma.

Other translations into English
forthcoming

Ānāpāna Dīpanī
Vijja Magga Dīpanī

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Part only published in Burma (revised by UBSC) 1961. A new translation published in full by S. S. Davidson, 1999 in a private edition for limited distribution only.

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

In the Manuals of Buddhism (first published in 1965) already referred to elsewhere, there is reference to a translation, by the Editors of the Light of the Dhamma (of the first 2 Chapters, up to and including the Analysis of the Element of Heat (*Tejo*)) of *Alin-Kyan*.

That this work of Ledi Sayadaw's should be readily available in a complete translation has always been thought essential and long overdue.

With very good fortune a well-known translator – U Tin U (Myaung) – was found who very kindly and with great ability produced an entirely new and most readable translation, as long ago as May 1983.

Unfortunately, due to a whole series of difficulties and delays it is only now that publication has become possible.

With prior approval the translation was submitted to the well-known Burmese scholar-monk the Venerable Sayadaw U Nyanika, *Aggamahāpaṇḍita*, who very kindly undertook to critically read through the whole of U Tin U's translation and suggested several valuable improvements on the rendering of some technical Abhidhamma terms, as well as of a few Burmese words, most of which have now been incorporated in this first complete translation into English. Regretfully, however, minor inconsistencies still remain.

About the author I do not think it would be out-of-place to repeat here what has already been said in the present Editor's "Foreword" to the English translation of the *Maggaṅga Dīpanī* – The Manual of the Constituents of the Noble Path – :

The Venerable Ledi *Araññavihāravāsī Mahā Thera* of Monywa better known as the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw, *Aggamahāpaṇḍita*, *D. Litt.* is described, in the short Biography reproduced at the end of this work as 'perhaps the outstanding Buddhist figure of this age'.

Of this there can be little doubt and provides the very reason why every attempt should be made to make known to Western readers and in particular English speaking readers as many as possible of the numerous works originally written by him either in

Pali or Burmese, which are clear and precise expositions of Buddhism, suited to people of wide and differing abilities and understanding and are invaluable aids for the study and practice of Dhamma in all its aspects.

Of works already translated into English every credit must be given to the Pali Text Society, England, for publishing as early as 1913-14, in their Journal for those years, a translation of selected passages of *Yamaka Pucchā Vissajjanā* – ‘Some Points in Buddhist Doctrine’ and again in their Journal for the years 1915-16 a translation, by U Shwe Zan Aung, B.A., of the *Paṭṭhānuddesa Dīpanī* or ‘Philosophy of Relations’.

But it is to Burma that so much is owed for continuing with the translation into English and publication of the works of this Sayadaw, through the medium of the periodical ‘The Light of the Dhamma’, which was printed by the Union Buddha Sāsana Council Press. The Inaugural Number of this periodical first appeared in 1952 but, unfortunately, publication ceased about 11 years later in 1963, though the publication was revived about 1979.

During these first 11 years some 7 major works or Dīpanīs, translated by various hands, had been published, in serial form, in ‘The Light of the Dhamma’, and all these works continue to be available, though separately, combined together in 1 volume – ‘The Manuals of Buddhism’ – and published by the Department of Religious Affairs, Rangoon. Regrettably this Manual, as well as other Buddhist publications, are often extremely difficult to obtain outside Burma and sometimes are to be found only in Public, University, or Buddhist libraries.

Although in the short Biography reproduced hereafter a figure of more than 70 works is shown to have been written by the Venerable Sayadaw, when including smaller articles not already recorded and many relevant letters, etc., the final figure may well be found to be in excess of 100 as further research continues and an attempt made to compile a comprehensive list.

In addition 2 separate Biographies which have been written about Ledi Sayadaw still await a competent translator into English and a donor to sponsor publication.

The reputation of Ledi Sayadaw still lives on in Burma and in the Buddhist world. He was a Bhikkhu of great learning, and a

prolific writer with a unique style of exposition, and although there are some traditionalists who do not support or agree with some of his interpretations, there are those who find them of great interest. He was also an austere Bhikkhu, yet a very human one, who would often write a whole treatise or a long letter in reply to a question asked by one of his supporters or enquirers.

Apart from accepting many bhikkhu-students from various parts of Burma in order to impart Buddhist education to them Ledi Sayadaw also toured many parts of Burma for the purpose of propagating the Buddha Dhamma; delivering various discourses on the Dhamma, establishing Abhidhamma classes and Meditation centres. He also composed Abhidhamma rhymes or Abhidhamma Saṅkhitta and taught them to his Abhidhamma classes.

In the year 1910, while residing at Masoyain Monastery, Mandalay, the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw, together with the *Abhi Dhaja Mahā Ratṭha Guru* Masoyain Sayadaw of Mandalay (President of the Sixth Great Buddhist Council), the Venerable Saydaw U Nyāṇa (who also translated into English Ledi Sayadaw's *Paṭṭhānuddesa Dīpanī* (or *Paccayuddesadīpanī*) – 'The Concise Exposition of the Paṭṭhāna Relations', but published under the title 'The Buddhist Philosophy of Relations') and U Shwe Zan Aung B.A., founded the Burma Buddhist Foreign Mission and this project was carried on by the Masoyain Sayadaw of Mandalay until the death of his English-educated colleague in this undertaking the Sayadaw U Nyāṇa, who died some 13 years after the death of the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw, who died in 1923.

There are still monasteries in Burma such as the Kyaikkasan Ledi Meditation Centre in Rangoon, as well as the one established by Ledi Sayadaw himself near Monywa under the name of Leditawya Monastery where his teachings and expositions are preserved and continue to be studied.

It is well known that at Mandalay in Burma in 1856 King Mindon (1852-1877) conceived the meritorious idea of having the Pāli Tipiṭaka carved on (729) marble slabs, in order that the Teaching might be preserved, the work taking from 1860 to 1868. In 1871 King Mindon convened the Fifth Great Buddhist Council. It is not, however, so well known, outside Burma that a similar mark of respect for the works of the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw was made,

by his supporters, at Monywa in Upper Burma after his death. This recognition and treatment of a Buddhist monk's works must be unique and gives some indication of the immense importance attached to his writings.

The already mentioned importance attached to Ledi Sayadaw's works and the difficulty of obtaining them in the Western World demands that every effort be made to try and collect as many as possible of the Sayadaw's works, either in Pāli, Burmese or in translation, and make them accessible to the West by adding them, by way of presentation, to the large number of his works already held by the British Library in London, where they would continue to be available to Bhikkhus, scholars, students and the like.

In undertaking the reprinting of the Alin-Kyan, however, a small effort is being made to make this fundamental Exposition of the Buddha's Teaching available to interested students and readers in both the East and the West with the earnest wish that others will be encouraged thereby to help make the works of the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw known to a wider audience.

The Venerable Ledi Sayadaw wrote the Alin-Kyan in Burmese but the retention or use of Pāli words in translations has always been considered essential for, in cases where any doubt may arise as to the suitability of the word or words used by the translator, the quoting of the Pali ensures that a clear and definite meaning, which may vary in accordance with the context in which they are used, is most often to be found in the original Pāli and its Commentaries.

In addition to the invaluable aid it provides for students and other interested readers, as a means of reference for study purposes, the inclusion of Pāli may also be said to add to the translation the savour of the language of the Buddha himself, as found in the Pāli Canon, together with the voice of elucidation of its Commentators.

Southsea, 1999.

S. S. Davidson.

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PREFACE

The theme of this book is to contrast the Five Kinds of Stark Ignorance, the darkness that shrouds the generality of the people, with the Five Kinds of Light, the Knowledge of the Buddha's Teaching. This theme was first expounded by Ledi Sayadaw to a big audience of over a thousand at Ye-u in May 1910 (1272 B.E. in the month of Kason) which was so very well received that the elders of the town such as U San Win, the Sub-divisional Officer, Ye-u; U Paw Shan, the Township Officer *cum* Township Magistrate, Ye-u; U Po Seik, Township Officer, Daze, Ye-u Sub-division; U Hteik Tin Wa, Township Officer, Tamadaw, Ye-u Sub-division – made their request to Ledi Sayadaw to publish it in book form.

Again in March (Tabaung) of the same year the Venerable Sayadaw delivered a sermon on the same theme to an audience of over five thousand at Daungyo Quarter, Mandalay. After the event the Venerable Shin Mālā, a close disciple of Ledi Sayadaw, made an earnest appeal to his master for publishing the sermon for the benefit of the general public. It is in compliance with those requests that the author penned this treatise in a concise but lucid style.

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namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

(Veneration to the Exalted One, the Homage – worthy, the
Perfectly Self-Enlightened)

CHAPTER ONE

Five Kinds of Stark Ignorance and Five Kinds of Light

- (A) The five kinds of Stark Ignorance are:
1. Stark Ignorance of *Kamma*, *Kamma-sammoha*;
 2. Stark Ignorance of *Dhamma*, *Dhamma-sammoha*;
 3. Stark Ignorance of Causality, *Paccaya-sammoha*;
 4. Stark Ignorance of the Three Characteristics of Existence, *Lakkhaṇa-sammoha*;
 5. Stark Ignorance of *Nibhāna*, *Nibhāna-sammoha*.
- (B) The five kinds of Light are:
1. Knowledge in seeing that all beings have *kamma* only as their own property, *Kammassakatā-ñāṇa*;
 2. Knowledge in being firmly settled about the *Dhamma*, *Dhamma-vavatthāna-ñāṇa*;
 3. Knowledge in Comprehending the Law of Causality, *Paccaya-vavatthāna-ñāṇa*;
 4. Knowledge in Realizing the Three Characteristics of Existence, *Lakkhaṇa-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*;
 5. Knowledge in Realizing *Nibhāna*, *Nibhāna-paṭivedha ñāṇa*.

(A) 1 and (B) 1: The Stark Ignorance of *Kamma* (*Kamma-sammoha*) and the First Light (*Kammassakatā-ñāṇa*) Knowledge in seeing that all beings have *Kamma* only as their own property.

I shall now set forth the first pair – *Kamma-sammoha* and *Kammassakatā-ñāṇa*. Of these *kamma-sammoha* means:-

- (i) Not understanding *kamma*, and
- (ii) Not understanding the resultant of *kamma*.

(i) Not understanding *kamma*.

- (a) Not understanding the fact that all beings have *kamma* only as their own property; that they must inherit their own *kamma*; that *kamma* alone is their origin; that *kamma* alone is their real relative; and that *kamma* alone is their real refuge.
- (b) Not understanding which of their actions – bodily, verbal, or mental – are unwholesome in the sense that they are kammically unprofitable (*a-kusalo*).*
- (c) Not understanding the fact that unwholesome actions bring unwholesome resultants in their future births, and would cast them down into the Four Lower Worlds of unfortunate existences (*apāya*).
- (d) Not understanding which of their actions – bodily, verbal, or mental – are wholesome *i.e.*, kammically profitable (*kusalo*).*
- (e) Not understanding the fact that wholesome actions bring wholesome resultants in their future births, and would send them to the fortunate existences of the human world and the world of *devas*.

Not understanding the nature and characteristics of *kamma* in the above stated manner therefore amounts to 'not understanding *kamma*'.

* *kusalo*: Lit., meritorious; *akusalo*: lit., demeritorious.

(ii) Not understanding the resultant of *kamma*:

- (a) Not understanding the fact that lives of beings do not end at their biological death, but that they would arise in another existence where their *kamma* casts them, sends them, drags them, assigns them, or places them.
- (b) Not understanding the fact that there exist an infinite number of sentient beings – though not visible to the ordinary human eye – in the tortuous worlds of *niraya*, hungry spirits (*petas*), fallen spirits (*asurakāyas*), and animals (some species common to human knowledge.)*
- (c) Not understanding the fact that if they commit unwholesome acts they are liable to be born in those four lower worlds (*apāya*), after their death.
- (d) Not understanding the fact that there exist infinite numbers and types of human beings, visible to the ordinary human eye, as well as an infinite number of spirits and *devas*, good or bad, together with those inhabiting the six *deva lokas* (worlds) and higher up, the *Brahmā Lokas* of the Fine-Material Realms (*rūpa brahmās*) and Non-Material Realms (*arūpa brahmās*).
- (e) Not understanding the fact that through acquisition of merit such as giving (*dāna*), virtue or morality (*sīla*) and developing concentration (*bhāvanā*) beings are bound to be born in those fortunate planes of the human world and the celestial realms of *devas* and *brahmās*.
- (f) Not understanding the fact that there exists the round of births (*saṃsāra*), that is beginningless and endless.

* Certain animals are not visible to the ordinary human eye, e.g.: *Nāgas* (serpents) or *Garulas* (monstrously huge birds), some of them quite resplendent and mighty; or *Kinnaras*, exquisite birds with human faces. It is significant to note that animals are mentioned in Pali as having *tiracchānayoṇi*, ‘having the body of an animal’, and not as belonging to any realm or level or plane of existence (*bhūmi*), as in the case of *niraya*, *Nāgas*, *Garulas* and *Kinnaras* (female, *Kinnaris*) are usually described as mythical animals. But from the standpoint of the infinite workings of *kamma* they are not to be easily assigned to myth. ‘Supernatural’ might perhaps be a better description for them, though not quite accurate. Tr.

- (g) Not understanding the fact that all beings are subjected to good or bad destinies through their own acts, good or bad as the case may be, and that beings are born from existence to existence, incessantly, according as their own *kamma* dictates.*

Failure in understanding all those things is called Stark Ignorance of *Kamma* or *kamma-sammoha*.

(Here ends a brief exposition of the First Stark Ignorance.)

(B) 1: *Kammassakatā-ñāṇa*: (The First Light):-

Kammassakatā-ñāṇa means:-

- (i) Understanding *kamma*, and
- (ii) Understanding the resultant of *kamma*.

Understanding ‘*kamma*’ and its resultant:

- (a) Understanding the fact that all beings have *kamma* only as their own property; that they must inherit their own *kamma*; that *kamma* alone is their real relative; and that *kamma* alone is their real refuge.
- (b) Understanding which of their actions – bodily, verbal, or mental – are unwholesome or kammically unprofitable; that they would bring unwholesome resultants in their future births, and would cast them down into the Four Lower Worlds.
- (c) Understanding that such and such actions of theirs are wholesome or kammically profitable; that they would bring wholesome resultants in their future births, and would send them to the fortunate existences of the human world and the worlds of *devas*.

To understand all those things is called *Kammassakatā-ñāṇa*.

(Here ends a brief exposition of *Kammassakatā-ñāṇa*.)

* The literal rendering: ‘according as their *kamma* sends them, casts them, drags them, assigns them, conveys them, or places them’.

Dreadful indeed is the Stark Ignorance of *kamma*. All sorts of wrong views (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) stem from it. *Kammassakatā-ñāṇa*, (on the other hand), is the refuge for the wayfarers of *samsāra*, the beginningless round of births. It is only under the guidance of this Light that beings do meritorious things such as giving, observe morality, or develop mental concentration and attain successful existences as men or *devas* or *Brahmās*. And it is this Light that enables one to practise wholesome deeds to perfection (*pāramī kusalo*) that are the prerequisites for enlightenment of all classes such as the Perfect Self-Enlightenment of a Buddha, or the solitary Self-Enlightenment of a *Pacceka-buddha*, or the arahatship as Noble Disciples (*sāvaka bodhi*).

The Light of *Kammassakatā-ñāṇa* exists in those men and *devas* in the innumerable universes or world systems, who have Right View or *Sammā diṭṭhi*. In our universe too, even during the 'empty' kappas, i.e., where the world goes without the benefit of any Buddha, this Light exists. By Right View (*sammā diṭṭhi*), of course, we mean this Light of *Kammassakatā-ñāṇa*.

At the present time this Light prevails among the Buddhists and Hindus in the world. Among people of other creeds, and among animals, this Light does not exist. Few among the inhabitants of the tortuous realms of *niraya*, the fallen spirits (*asūrakāya* world) and the hungry spirits (*peta* world) have the benefit of this Light. Those beings who do not possess such Light dwell in the darkness of *kamma-sammoha*. As they are enveloped in Stark Ignorance, the path leading to successful existences in their round of births is lost to them. And being incapable of lifting themselves up to the fortunate planes of human, *deva* or *Brahmā* existences, they are destined to go down to the Lower Worlds, whose portals are ever wide open. For these people, thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of existences may pass without their ever getting the slightest benefit of this beneficent Light.

Only in the case of a confirmed Buddha-to-be, i.e., a *hodhisatta* who has obtained the word of assurance from a living Buddha about his future Buddhahood in specific terms, has the shroud of ignorance been lifted already so that even when born an animal, he is yet endowed with this Light. Considering the fact that this Light belongs to the holders of Right View even during the world-

cycles (systems) or *kappas* devoid of any Buddha, and in those universes that lack the benefit of a Buddha's arising; and also considering the fact that Buddhas do not arise in the world only to expound this Light but to expound the Light of Knowledge that penetrates the Four Noble Truths (*catu sacca paṭivedha-ñāṇa*); the Light of *Kammassakatā-ñāṇa* cannot be called the Light of the Buddha's Teaching – in spite of its occurrence in many a Buddhist text. For it is merely a worldly Light, the Light that does not shed its rays beyond *samsāra*.

People who have the benefit of the Buddha's Teaching, therefore, if they are wise enough, will not remain satisfied with the mere Light of *Kammassakatā-ñāṇa* – which is not really meant by the Buddha – but will rouse themselves up to acquire the true light of the Buddha's Teaching. For this indeed is the wise course.

(Here ends the exposition of the first pair – Stark Ignorance of *Kamma* and the First Light.)

(A) 2 and (B) 2: The Stark Ignorance of *Dhamma* (*Dhamma sammoha*) and the Second Light (*Dhamma-vavatthāna-ñāṇa*) Knowledge in being firmly settled about the *Dhamma*.

I shall now set forth the second pair – *Dhamma-sammoha* and *Dhamma-vavatthāna-ñāṇa*. Of these *Dhamma-sammoha* means:-

- (i) Not understanding the *Dhamma* as *Dhamma*;
- (ii) Not understanding the ultimate truth about existence in that what has generally been taken as person (*puggala*), being (*satta*), self or soul (*atta*) or a life (*jīva*), is in truth and reality the mere compounded existence of materiality and mentality (mind-and-matter, *nāma-rūpa*) comprising the five aggregates. Out of this Stark Ignorance of the *Dhamma* there spring the three Perversions (*vipallāsa*), namely, (i) Perverted perception (*sañña vipallāsa*), (ii) Perverted consciousness (*citta vipallāsa*) and (iii) Perverted view (*diṭṭhi vipallāsa*).
- (i) **Error in Perception** means having the wrong perception about things, such as: *dhammā* or mere phenomena is not

perceived as *dhammā* or mere phenomena. but as person, being, self (soul), a life, woman or man, (etc.).

(ii) **Error in Thinking** means inability to think of *dhamma* as *dhamma*, but thinking only in terms of person, being, self (soul), a life, woman or man, (etc.).

(iii) **Error in Belief** means taking a wrong, perverted view of things: *dhammā* are not seen as *dhammā*, but taken for granted, through convention, as person, being, self (soul), a life, woman or man, (etc.).

(These, then, are the three Errors arising out Stark Ignorance of the *Dhamma*).

Out of those three Errors, there grow ten kinds of misdeeds such as killing living things (*pāṇātipatā*), as well as Wrong Views and all sorts of evil.

***Dhammavavatthāna-nāṇa* (The Second Light):-**

Knowledge in being firmly settled about the *Dhamma* means:-

- (a) Clear understanding that in all the world no such thing as person, being, self (soul), or a life, woman or man, really exists but only mere phenomena or *dhammā*, mind-and-matter (*nāma-rūpa*, mentality-materiality).
- (b) Perceiving the distinction between physical phenomena (*rūpa*) and mental phenomena (*nāma*);
- (c) Perceiving the distinction between one physical phenomenon and another among the physical phenomena;
- (d) Perceiving the distinction between one mental phenomenon and another among the mental phenomena.

It means in brief, the whole thing amounts to Right View (*sammā diṭṭhi*), which also goes by the name of Purification of View (*Diṭṭhi visuddhi*).

Dreadful indeed is the Stark Ignorance of the *Dhamma*. It is only with the golden opportunity of coming under the Buddha's Teaching that we can gain the clear understanding that mentality-and-materiality, a composite of the five aggregates of existence, are mere phenomena or *dhammā* in ultimate truth. Without the

benefit of the Buddha's Teaching, beings may pass from one existence to another a hundred times, a thousand times, tens of thousands of times, or an infinite number of times (*asankheyya*), and yet no such knowledge can dawn on them. Yet, this is the Light that only the Buddha's Teaching can provide. Even at present when the golden opportunity of the Buddha's Teaching is available, there are multitudes who, not realizing *dhammā* as *dhammā*, not understanding materiality as mere materiality and not understanding mentality as mere mentality, are shrouded by this dreadful Stark Ignorance of the *Dhamma*. Helpless do they remain there in stark darkness. Lacking this Light, their existence is marked by a proliferation of the three Perversions, the ten kinds of misdeeds, all kinds of wrong views and consequent evils. Release from the rigorous round of births is not in sight for them. Indeed, they are heading straight for the whirlpool of *samsāra*, to drift, sink, and get drowned. It behoves well, therefore, for the wise and wary, to strive to understand the materiality-mentality phenomena, and gain analytical insight.

(Here ends the exposition of the second pair – Stark Ignorance of the *Dhamma* and the Second Light).

(A) 3 and (B) 3: The Stark Ignorance of Causality (*Paccaya-sammoha*) and the Third Light (*Paccaya-vavatthāna-ñāṇa*) Knowledge in Comprehending the Law of Causality.

I shall now set forth the third pair – *Paccaya-sammoha* and *Paccaya-vavatthāna-ñāṇa*. Of these *Paccaya-sammoha* means:-

- (a) Not understanding the origin of materiality-and-mentality.
- (b) Not understanding the Law of Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*)*, as declared by the Buddha: "With Ignorance (*avijjā*) as condition, there arise Volitional Activities (*saṅkhārā*); with volitional activities as condition, there arises Consciousness (*viññāṇa*); with consciousness as condition, there arise Mentality-and-

* *Paṭicca-samuppāda*: (*Paṭicca*, 'having depended'; *sam* right; *uppāda*, arising). Dependent arising.

Materiality (*nāma-rūpa*;...(P:) thus there arises this ‘whole mass of ills’ *dukkhakkhandhā*.”

When one is ignorant of this Law of Causality, one firmly holds the wrong view of *kāraṇa-ditṭhi*, insisting that if there is an action there is a doer, so that materiality and mentality cannot be seen as distinct phenomena or *dhammā*, but as some person or being.*

***Paccaya-vavatthāna-ñāṇa*: (The Third Light)**

Knowledge in comprehending the Law of Causality means:-

- (a) Understanding the origin of materiality-and-mentality.
- (b) Understanding the twelve constituents (*aṅgā*) that make up the Law of Dependent Origination as declared by the Buddha thus:

“With Ignorance as condition, there arise Volitional Activities; with volitional activities as condition, there arises Consciousness; ... mentality and materiality; ... the six Sense-Bases (*saḷāyatana*); ...Contact (*phassa*); ... Feeling (*vedanā*); ... Craving (*taṇhā*); ... Clinging (*upādāna*); ... the Process of Becoming (*bhava*); ... Birth (*jāti*); ... Ageing and Death (*jarā-maraṇa*), Sorrow (*soka*), Lamentation (*parideva*), Pain, Suffering (*dukkha*), Grief (*domanassa*), and Despair (*upāyāsa*). Thus there arises this ‘whole mass of ills’ (*dukkhakkhandhā*)**”.

* The Burmese original being terse here, the meaning is drawn from the author’s explanation of *kāraṇa-ditṭhi* in the section on *Paccaya-pariggaha-ñāṇa* below, P.34.

** *dukkhakkhandhā*: (*dukkha*: ill, woeful; *khandhā*: collection or mass) ‘the whole body of ills or woes’.

Out of the Stark Ignorance of Causality, three kinds of grave Wrong Views arise, namely:

- (i) The Wrong View of No-cause (*A-hetuka diṭṭhi*)*
 - (ii) The Wrong View that the world is created by an Eternal God (*visamahetu diṭṭhi*)**.
 - (iii) The Wrong View that the world is a product of past deeds (*pubbekata hetu diṭṭhi****).
- (i) ***Ahetuka diṭṭhi*** holds that all things in the world, whether physical phenomena or mental phenomena, arise through no cause, exist through no cause, that all things happen by mere chance.
 - (ii) ***Visamehetu diṭṭhi*** believes in a cause but it assigns the cause to an Omnipotent Creator, an Eternal God or Providence. All beings, all physical and mental phenomena, all things, all activities, all happenings are in accordance with Providence. This is in fact baseless, untenable, uneven or unjust.
 - (iii) ***Pubbekata hetu diṭṭhi*** believes in reasoned Cause and, while rejecting the theory of a Creator, accepts the view that the world (i.e., all materiality and mentality) arises, and is conditioned by wholesome and unwholesome actions done by beings in their past existences. This view takes into account only past *kamma*, in total disregard of present volitional activities.

Of these three Wrong Views, *Ahetuka diṭṭhi* is a gross view, as indeed is *Visama hetu diṭṭhi*. *Pubbekata hetu diṭṭhi*, being partially correct, is relatively less erroneous.

* *Ahetuka diṭṭhi*: (*hetu*: cause); view that there is no cause whatever for the arising of the world.

** *Visamahetu diṭṭhi*: (*visama*: uneven or unjust); view that holds an unjust, untrue, untenable cause.

*** *Pubbekata hetu diṭṭhi*: (*pubbe*: 'in the past'; *kata*, 'done').

How *Pubbekata hetu diṭṭhi* is partially right:-

Materiality and mentality are conditioned by:-

- (a) Past *kamma*,
- (b) present consciousness or *citta*,
- (c) temperature prevailing at present (*utu*), and
- (d) nutriment in the present life (*ahāra*).

That being so, this view is correct in so far as it relates to materiality and mentality which arise on account of past *kamma*; but as regards all other materiality and mentality caused by Consciousness, Temperature or Nutriment it is wrong.

If we apply the Law of Dependent Origination this view holds good for those factors which are conditioned by past *kamma**; but it is wrong in respect of those which are themselves the present causes (that are the 'conditions for rebirth-linking in the future')**, namely, Ignorance, Volitional Activities, Craving, Clinging and the Process of Becoming.

If we consider it in the light of the Doctrine of Relations (*Paṭṭhāna*), this view recognizes only the relationship of past *kamma* to its effects (*nānākkhanika kamma paccaya*) and rejects the twenty-three other Relations as also the Relation of Co-nascent or Co-existent *kamma* (*sahajāta kamma paccaya*)***. Thus *Pubbekatahetudiṭṭhi*, while partially right, is substantially wrong.

* The factors which are conditioned by past *kamma* are fivefold, namely: Consciousness, Mentality-Materiality, the six Sense-Bases, Contact and Feeling.

** 'There are five causes now as well'. (*Visuddhimagga* or the Path of Purification) they are: Ignorance, ... the Process of Becoming.

*** In effect this view rejects 23½ out of 24 Relations. For the relation of *Kamma* (*kamma paccaya*) is of two kinds, to wit, co-existent (co-nascent) *kamma* or *Sahajāta – kamma paccaya* and asynchronous *kamma* or *Nānākkhanika kamma paccaya*. The former is a causal relation standing (to its effects), by way of co-existent (co-nascent) *kamma*; the latter is a thing differing in point of time from its effects. (*Nānā*: 'varying or different'; *khanika*: pertaining to a certain moment).

In the *Abhidhamma* there is always a causal series of relations between all happenings. These relations or *paccayas* are classified into twenty-four species in the *Paṭṭhāna*, an exhaustive exposition (*mahā pakarana*) of immense subtlety.

The above mentioned three kinds of Wrong View, together with all sorts of other false views and Sceptical Doubt (*vicikicchā*) spring from the Stark Ignorance of Causality.

***Cūḷa-sotāpanna* or the Virtuous One**

To understand Dependent Origination or to gain Knowledge in comprehending the Law of Causality enables one to discard the three aforesaid Wrong Views of No-cause, Unjustified Cause of Creation, and misleading belief in past-*kamma* alone. In fact this Knowledge equips one to be a virtuous one, ever freed from the ignoble destinies of the Four Lower Worlds, a *Cūḷa-sotāpanna*, a future-stream-winner – so the Commentaries say. Hence a goal well worth striving for.

(Here ends the exposition of the third pair – Stark Ignorance of Causality and the Third Light.)

(A) 4 and (B) 4: The Stark Ignorance of the Three

Characteristics of Existence (*lakkhaṇa-sammoha*) and the Fourth Light Knowledge in Realizing the Three Characteristics of Existence (*lakkhaṇa-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*).

I shall now set forth the fourth pair – *Lakkhaṇa-sammoha* and *Lakkhaṇa-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*. Of these, *Lakkhaṇa-sammoha* means:-

The inability to understand the fact about the interrelated phenomena of materiality and mentality:

- (i) That they have the character of impermanence (*anicca*), being in a rapid state of flux;
- (ii) That they have the character of suffering and pain (*dukkha*), very much to be dreaded;
- (iii) That they have the character of not-self (*anatta*) in the sense that they are mere conditioned phenomena lacking substance, essence or life that could in truth and reality be called a person or a being at all.

Lakkhaṇapaṭivedha-ñāṇa

Lakkhaṇapaṭivedha-ñāṇa means:

Realizing through insight the truth about the interrelated

phenomena of materiality and mentality in their true character:

- (i) That they are impermanent or transient, ever in a rapid state of flux (*anicca*);
- (ii) That they are fraught with suffering and pain, truly to be dreaded (*dukkha*);
- (iii) That they do not make up any 'self' or person or being because they lack substance, essence or life (*anatta*).

It is this realization, this Light, that enables the Buddha, the *Pacceka buddhas* and the *Arahats* to gain release from the darkness of defilements (*kilesa*) the dungeon of fettered existence (*samyojana*), the stout bonds of Craving (*taṇhā*) that bind all worldlings, keeping them hopelessly entangled, thereby exposing them forever to the perils and ills of *Samsāra*.

Failing to realise the Three Characteristics, both *bhikkhu* and layman alike fumble in the darkness of their own defilements, in their dungeon of fettered existence. Bound by stout bonds of Craving, they get entangled and are forever exposed to the perils and ills of *samsāra*. Only when they attain the Light of this Knowledge do they dispel the darkness of Stark Ignorance of the Three Characteristics; then and then only can they gain release from the bondage of their own Craving, and attain *Nibhāna*.

(Here ends the exposition of the fourth pair – Stark Ignorance of the Three Characteristics and the Fourth Light.)

(A) 5 and (B) 5: The Stark Ignorance of Nibbāna (*nibbāna-sammoha*) and the Fifth Light Knowledge in Realizing Nibbāna (*nibbāna-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*).

I shall now set forth the fifth pair – *nibhāna-sammoha* and *nibhāna-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*. Of these *nibhāna-sammoha* may be briefly explained as follows:-

As wayfarers in the woeful round of existences, most beings are ignorant of their true plight. They fail to understand the right practice by which they can bring about a complete cessation of all ill (*dukkha*) through the cutting off of all fetters and entanglements of their own Craving. They do not know that there is such a practice under the Buddha's Teaching that can save them from the darkness

of defilements and having stilled their burning desires, land them in the Absolute Peace (*santi*) which is *Nibhāna*.

As the five kinds of Stark Ignorance give way to the five kinds of Light stage by stage, once the Fifth Light is attained, the whole darkness of the five kinds of Ignorance are completely dispelled. The total extinction of this whole mass of Ignorance with no possibility of its ever arising again is the final goal of Peace or Tranquillity (*santi*) or *Nibhāna*.

And with the total extinction of the five kinds of Stark Ignorance there also go to extinction all kinds of misdeeds, all forms of evil, all Wrong Views, and all misguided actions, thereby bringing to naught the woeful existences in the four Lower Worlds.

Nibhāna-paṭivedha-ñāṇa:

Knowing well that such a worthy goal of Peace or Tranquillity exists, and realizing this Peace through one's own experience, is, in short, called the Light of *Nibhāna* or *Nibhāna-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*. The four stages of enlightenment or Knowledge along the Noble Path are called *Nibhāna-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*.

(Here ends the brief exposition of the five kinds of Stark Ignorance and the five kinds of Light.)

CHAPTER TWO

The Four Lights of the Buddha's Teaching

Of the five kinds of Light the first one, *Kammasakatā-sammādiṭṭhi*, is not actually the Light of the Buddha's Teaching. It is merely the Light available in *Samsāra*, or the Light available in the world, a worldly Light.

Only the remaining four are truly the Light of the Buddha's Teaching.

1. *Dhamma-vavatthāna-ñāṇa*, the Second Light,
2. *Paccaya-pariggaha* or *Paccaya-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*, the Third Light,
3. *Lakkhana-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*, the Fourth Light, and
4. *Nibhana-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*, the Fifth Light -

So in this second chapter I am not discussing the First Light, but shall dwell on the Four True Lights of the Buddha's Teaching in a fairly comprehensive manner.

Six Kinds of Element (*Dhātu*)

To get oneself established in the *Dhamma* or to attain the Light of *Dhamma-vavatthāna-ñāṇa*, it may properly be asked: "What absolute minimum must one understand about materiality and mentality so as to attain this Second Light?" The answer is: by understanding the six kinds of Element (*dhātu*), namely, -

- (1) the Element of Extension (*paṭhavīdhātu*),
 - (2) the Element of Cohesion (*āpodhātu*),
 - (3) the Element of Heat (*tejodhātu*),
 - (4) the Element of Motion (*vāyo dhātu*),
 - (5) the Element of Space (*ākāsa dhātu*), and
 - (6) the Element of Consciousness (*viññāṇa dhātu*),
- one can attain this Second Light.

In the ultimate sense, (as taught in the *Abhidhamma*, the 'Higher Doctrine'), there is no personal entity in what is generally called a person or a being, nor a soul or a self or a life anywhere. What really exists are the six Elements such as the Element of Extension (*paṭhavī*). In worldly usage we speak of person or being or a life but these are mere conceptual terms.

An example

Let us take one example. We have around us a variety of structures built of timber or bamboo, such as a house, a monastery, a temple, a rest-house or a pandal. When we speak of a certain structure as a 'house' we are not referring to the timber or the bamboo of which it is built; rather we are referring to a certain type of structure generally recognized as a house which is only a secondary name of the timber or bamboo in it. When these materials – timber or bamboo – were in the form of standing trees, they were not called a house. Only when they have assumed the shape of a house do they acquire the secondary name of 'house'. Now this name is a mere coinage, something that has suddenly appeared, as if a bolt from the blue. It is actually foreign to the true material that it is built of. In the ultimate sense, therefore, we see that there is no such thing as 'house', but only timber or bamboo. The name 'house' therefore only refers to a certain type of structure, after a certain shape or appearance that it has taken: it does not exist in the last analysis. For the same materials – timber or bamboo as the case may be – that once went into the construction of the house may, after the house has been pulled down, be re-built as a monastery in a monastic compound. They then assume the form of a monastery, and are called a monastery accordingly. The shape and form of a house is no more there, so we do not call it a house any more. Again, let us say, the self-same materials, after the monastery having been pulled down, are rebuilt as a temple or a turreted tower (*pyaṭṭhat*) in front of a pagoda. Then they take the new shape known as a temple or a turreted tower, and are therefore called a 'temple' or a 'tower', and not a 'monastery'. Further, let us say, these materials are reused in the construction of a rest-house, the name 'temple' disappears, and the new name of 'rest-house' is used in respect of the same materials. Further again, if that rest-

house be converted into a pandal, the name 'rest-house' disappears, and the new name of 'pandal' comes into use. When forms are destroyed, names disappear. Only when forms appear, names also come into common usage.

The materials – timber or bamboo – that have gone into the construction of the various structures, are all the time just timber or bamboo. They were timber or bamboo as standing trees; when they have taken on the various shapes of 'house', 'monastery', 'temple', 'rest-house' or 'pandal', they are still timber or bamboo. When the pandal is pulled down and its component parts piled on the ground, the materials are still piles of timber or bamboo. By origin there is no such thing as 'house', 'monastery', 'temple', 'rest-house' or 'pandal': only when the basic materials are assembled into such shapes do those terms become valid. The basic materials – timber or bamboo – are there throughout as timber or bamboo, for they are of their own origin. That is why it is said that in the ultimate sense, according to the *Adhidhamma*, there is no such thing as 'house', 'monastery', 'temple', 'rest-house' or 'pandal'; only timber or bamboo exist in truth and reality.

Yet when we say the house exists, it is not telling a falsehood, for in the conventional sense the statement is true, and it does not mislead anyone. In the ultimate sense of the *Abhidhamma*, however, it is wrong to say the house exists because what we call a house is merely a certain structural form built by the architect, conventionally accepted as a house. If someone asks, "What actually is the thing called 'house'?" and someone points to the building and says, "This is a house", here in conventional usage this is correct. But in the *Abhidhamma* sense it is incorrect.

Why? Because, what actually does the pointing finger mean, the house or the timber/bamboo? Since what is called a house is in fact a mere structural form, what is actually meant is only the timber/bamboo, the real things, the things that originally exist. To call these materials a house is a mere misconception, a case of mistaken identity. If the name 'house' were the true name that is intrinsically applicable to timber or bamboo, the name must have been used when timber or bamboo were standing as trees. And also, whatever form of structure (monastery, temple, etc.) these materials may have assumed, the name 'house' should be the valid

term of reference for them. But this is not the case. A house is a house only when certain materials are put into a certain conventional form called a house. Similarly, the names 'monastery', 'temple', etc., also are valid only when the basic materials have the shapes of what are conventionally recognized as monastery or temple, etc. This is how conventional truth differs from the ultimate truth of the *Abhidhamma*. This difference should be well understood.

Of these two, conventional truth is used in the mundane sphere and is valid in its own sphere only. The ultimate truth of the *Abhidhamma*, on the other hand, is useful to get one beyond the mundane sphere to the supramundane sphere of *Nibhāna*. Using timber or bamboo, we make all sorts of objects – say, couch, throne, bench, boat or cart which go by these various names conventionally. In the *Abhidhamma* sense, however, no such thing as couch, throne, bench, boat or cart really exists: only the materials of which they are made really exist. Using earth we make pots, basins, cups and vessels which are called by these respective names conventionally; but according to the *Abhidhamma* there are no such things as pot, basin, cup or vessel – all are only earth. Iron is made into all sorts of ironmongery; copper into all sorts of copperware; gold into all sorts of gold-ware; silver into all sorts of silver-ware; cotton into all sorts of fabrics and dresses; and all of them acquire the names of the fabricated products. According to the *Abhidhamma*, none of those objects exists, but only the basic materials of which they are made exist. We should distinguish what is the basic truth of the original material from the fabricated object that has taken on a certain form.

In respect of person, being, self (soul) or a life too, these terms are valid conventionally only. In the *Abhidhamma* there exists no person, being, self (soul) nor a life; only the six basic Elements such as *paṭhavī* exist. No such thing as man or *deva*, *Sakka* or *Brahmā*, cow, buffalo or elephant exists in truth; in reality only the six basic Elements exist in all the world. Woman, man, this or that person, I, you, etc., are conventional terms for that which do not really exist; what really exist are the six basic Elements only. So there is no head, leg, hand, eye, ear, nose, etc., because all are the six basic Elements in the last analysis. All the organs of the

body such as hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, stomach, bowels (faeces), etc., do not exist; but only the Elements such as *paṭhavī* etc., really exist.

All along the long, vast extent of *Samsāra's* journey, we have become ingrained in misconcepts about things all about us and around us, believing mere forms as facts of life. The fact lies in the truth that all things, big or small, in the ultimate analysis, are a mere heap of elements, a mass of elements, a collection of elements, a lump of elements, and nothing more. Such definitive insight is the Light of Knowledge called 'being firmly settled in the *Dhamma*'.

Analysis of the Element of Extension (*Paṭhavī dhātu*)

I shall now explain about the Four Great Elements beginning with the Element of Extension (*paṭhavī dhātu*).

(1) *Paṭhavī*: Element of Extension:-

Paṭhavī has the property of hardness (*kakkhala*) or softness (*mudu*). This property is the Earth Element in the ultimate sense.

(2) *Āpo*: Element of Cohesion:-

Āpo has the property of cohesion (*ābandhanam*) and liquidity (*paggharanam*). This property is the Water Element in the ultimate sense.

(3) *Tejo*: Element of Heat:-

Tejo has the property of heat (*uṇha bhāvo*) and cold (*sīta bhāvo*). This property is the Fire Element in the ultimate sense.

(4) *Vāyo*: Element of Motion:-

Vāyo has the property of support (*vitthambhanam*) and motion (*samudīranam*). This property is the Wind Element in the ultimate sense.

The meanings of the these Four Great Elements should be digested and learnt by heart.

I shall proceed to expound the said Four Great Elements so that the Light of the definitive Knowledge of the *Dhamma* may dawn on the reader.

Earth Element (*paṭhavī*) in the ultimate sense means the mere property of hardness. By *paṭhavī* is not meant any substance – not even a hundred thousandth part of an atom. It lacks shape, mass, form, core or solidity. (That is why) this Element exists in very clear spring water or river water; in all forms of light including sunlight and moonlight or even the lustre of gems; in sound – all vibrant sounds including the sounds of gongs or pagoda bells; in moving air – from the softest breeze to gales; in smells, good or bad, that spread near and far.

The rationale for this peculiar property lies in the state of inseparability (*avinibbhoga vutti*) of the Four Great Elements. For as the Buddha says:

“Depending on one of the Great Elements,
the remaining three arise;
Depending on three of them,
the remaining one arises;
Depending on two of them,
the remaining two arise.”

(*Ekam mahābhūtaṃ paṭicca tayo mahābhūtā;
Tayo mahābhūte paṭicca ekam mahābhūtaṃ;
Dve mahābhūte paṭicca dve mahābhūtā.*)*

The Commentaries explain that it is the function (*sampaṭicchana rasā*) of Earth Element (*paṭhavī*) to receive the three other (co-nascent) elements of Water, Wind and Fire.

The nature of Water, Wind and Fire Elements are such that they cannot exist without Earth Element as their basis.

From the foregoing statements it should be understood that in all forms of water, colour, sound, wind and smell, there invariably exists this Earth Element.

This is on the authority of the scriptures.

* No Burmese rendering of this passage in the original.

Proof by empirical data can also be made. In any mass of water or of wind, it is fairly evident that the lower layers are supporting the successively upper ones. Now this function of supporting is not the property of *āpo* whose characteristic is cohesion. It is not the property of *tejo* either, for *tejo* is characterised by its thermal quality only. Support is the joint function of *paṭhavī* and *vāyo*. Support implies hardness or the capacity to bear, and it also implies lifting or the capacity to resist. The former is the characteristic of Earth Element, the latter that of Wind Element. Wind Element acquires its property of resistance on the strength of hardness, the characteristic of Earth Element. It cannot function alone. One should try to understand the distinction between **hardness** and **resistance** that co-exist in the function of **supporting**.

Thus we can discern the pressure of the element of hardness in water or in wind, and from that we can safely conclude that the element of extension or hardness, the ultimate Earth Element, exists in water and wind.

In the case of light and smell, however, although the element of hardness or extension is definitely there, this element is too subtle to notice. No empirical data can be drawn from them. We have simply to rely on the authority of the Texts.

The fact of the presence of *paṭhavī* in the clearest water, light, wind, sound and smell, is stated here to impress the truth that it is the mere property of **hardness** that we mean by the ultimate Earth Element; to drive home the point that the property of hardness does not mean any particle that has any form or solidity, any minutest substance of even a hundred thousandth part of an atom.

(The mere property of hardness must not be confused with the **manifestation** of hardness in things.)

By 'hardness' we should understand the term as a relative concept. What is hard or soft is spoken of by comparison: thus we have varying degrees of hardness at the bottom of which we call it softness. With the cutting diamond or *Vajira* at one extreme and the corporeality of a moonbeam at the other, we should discern the same property of hardness in varying degrees in all materiality. That is the character of Earth Element. This character of hardness

can only be discerned as an ultimate truth. For if conventional perception stands in the way, no 'hardness' can ever be found in subtle materiality such as moonlight, etc.

When hundreds of thousands of crores of Earth Element – by themselves the mere property of hardness – happen to be held together by the Element of Cohesion or Water Element, *Āpo*, a form appears, which is given the name 'atom'. When thousands of crores of such atoms come together certain forms (of life) come into being, beginning with tiny insects. As the materiality increases, all kinds of beings with varying sizes, up to *Asurinda*, Lord of the *Asuras* (fallen spirits), whose height is forty-eight hundred *yojanās*, take their forms. As regards external things this phenomenon of materiality takes the shape and extent of Mount *Meru* which is 168,000 *yojanās* high, and the Great Earth of the universe itself which has a thickness of 240,000 *yojanās*.

It is the Earth Element with its property of hardness that serves as the basis of all forms of materiality, animate or inanimate, from atoms and insects to the whole universe. And no other element has the property of assuming form or shape. The three other elements of Water, Wind and Fire depend on Earth for their existence. Thus one should realize the importance of Earth as the basic Element in all materiality.

If you want to contemplate Earth as an ultimate reality in Mount *Meru*, or in this Great Earth, you concentrate only on the property of hardness which lacks substance. As you concentrate only on its function (giving support to all forms of materiality) it will be seen as a reflection in a mirror on a clear surface of water, without the obstruction of the tiniest substance, not even an atom.

If there remains the faintest idea of substance or form or solid mass, even as much as an atom, your view is not on the ultimate truth of Earth. It is not free from the concept of form conventionally accepted throughout. This conventional truth stands in the way of understanding the true characteristics – arisings and vanishings – of materiality.

On this subject of contemplating the Elements it may be mentioned that the Venerable *Punṇa* taught the Venerable *Ānanda* using the example of the image in the mirror, and the Venerable *Ānanda* won enlightenment of the First Stage (*sotāpanna*).

If one is to understand the property of hardness only, unencumbered by any conventional concept of substance or form, that truly exists in Mount *Meru* or the Great Earth, one should find it much easier to comprehend this ultimate truth in lesser objects, animate or inanimate.

Images reflected in the mirror – be they as big as Mount *Meru* – are liable to vanish, when opportune, over a hundred times as fast as the blink of an eye or a flash of lightning, because there is actually no trace of any substance in them. Exactly so, the Earth Element in all materiality – be it as big as Mount *Meru* – is liable to vanish, when opportune, in an equally fast manner, because there is in the ultimate truth no substance, not even as much as an atom, in it. This fact will dawn on the meditator. When he contemplates the Earth Element in his own body with a view to gaining insight into physical phenomena, he should concentrate on a specific part at a time. So when he is contemplating Earth Element in the head he should exercise his thought throughout the head both inside and out. While doing so the concept of colour might come in which is not the ultimate property of Earth Element. So also the concept of form or shape might stand in the way. All these obstructionist concepts must be discarded with great mental alertness.

As he proceeds to the lower parts of his body, down to the soles, he should specify his field only to the extent of his practical capability in concentration. Having thus covered the whole body piecemeal, he will now be in a position to contemplate on a part, say, the head, and yet be able to comprehend the whole body. Once such comprehension has arisen within oneself, one comprehends the same phenomenon in all other things, animate or inanimate, in all the universe – indeed, all other universes.

And once Earth Element is thus comprehended, one finds no difficulty in comprehending the three remaining Elements.

(Here ends the brief analysis of *Pathvī*).

Analysis of the Element of Cohesion (*Āpo dhātu*)

(2) *Āpo*: Element of Cohesion:-

Āpo has the property of cohesion. This property alone is Water Element in the ultimate sense. When the property of cohesion is strong it tends to ooze and become fluid – hence *paṭhavī* is expressed as Water Element. This (basic) property of cohesion in the ultimate sense bears no substance whatever, not even a hundred-thousandth part of an atom: it is just a property or a function. Its function is to bind together the three other co-existing elements of Earth, Fire and Wind so that the four exist interdependently. Once the Water Element disappears the three other elements become disintegrated and vanish at once. This is the crucial function of the Water Element in any given group or unit of materiality.

All material shapes and forms ranging from the atom to *Asurinda*, Lord of the *Asuras*, in the living world, as well as all physical phenomena up to Mount *Meru* and the Great Earth, exist in the world, due to the Water Element. Apart from this Water Element there is no other element that holds materiality together.

If cohesion were to fail in Mount *Meru*, the whole 168,000 *yojanās* of the great mountain would crumble and vanish in no time. The same would be true of Mount *Cakkavāḷa* which is 164,000 *yojanās* high; or of the Great Earth, in which latter case we could imagine an eerie void in place of the Great Earth. This is because when the function of cohesion is absent, even the rock formations that make Mount *Meru* or Mount *Cakkavāḷa* or the Great Earth cannot stand together since the primary elements that constitute them lack the necessary binding force.

All the elements in the ultimate sense, with the exception of *Nibhāna*, are in the nature of being formed or conditioned (interdependently); so they cannot exist for a moment, not even for the blink of an eye, or a flash of lightning, without outside help or support.

If one means to understand Water Element in Mount *Meru*, or Mount *Cakkavāḷa*, or the Great Earth, one should concentrate only on the property of cohesion, without being distracted by the hardness therein (which is the property of Earth Element). Concepts of colour and form are likely to obscure the meditator's

comprehension. In such cases Knowledge lacks definition with the result that as one proceeds to contemplate the arisings and vanishings of phenomena the mind gets murky. For unless the ultimate truth of a given phenomenon (here Water Element) is comprehended well, the reality of impermanence (*anicca*), ill (*dukkha*) and not-self (*anatta*) will not be understood.

As has been explained in connection with Earth Element, here too when one clearly comprehends cohesion as the ultimate truth about Water Element, one will realize that no substance, solidity, mass or form truly exists even in Mount *Meru* or in the Great Earth; and that apart from the cohesion that characterises all materiality, one's concepts about shape or form or colour are just unsubstantial and as illusive as reflected images of shapes and colour – such as those of clouds, the sun, the moon, trees etc., – in the mirror or on the clear surface of water. When such clear comprehension of cohesion is gained in respect of Mount *Meru* or the Great Earth there can be no difficulty in realizing this fact in living things as well – may be man or *deva* or *Brahmā*. In fact one must necessarily comprehend it in respect of living things. We begin our reference to Mount *Meru* and the Great Earth to impress the fact of falsity (of concept of form, shape and colour) even in the greatest masses of material phenomena so that it will be more readily seen in respect of lesser materiality such as living beings.

(However, one should) first master the skill in comprehending this element in oneself from head to foot before contemplating it in others.

(Here ends the analysis of *Āpo*.)

Analysis of the Element of Heat (*tejo dhātu*)

Tejo: Element of Heat:-

The Element of Heat of the Fire Element has the property of heat or cold. This property alone is the Fire Element in the ultimate sense. Heat or cold is responsible for the growth and sustenance of the three other coexistent elements. Through maintaining an appropriate thermal degree in things, *tejo* provides the necessary function of maturing and invigorating the three other elements in a given physical phenomenon. (To take an example:) Eggs in a nest need the mother-hen's body-heat by constant brooding so that they hatch successfully. Without the mother's warmth going into them, the inborn heat acquired while in the mother's womb could not sustain them and they would simply rot.

Even so, *tejo* is like the mother-hen and the remaining three elements are like the yolk of an egg. Only in combination with the Fire Element can hardness (Earth Element) come into existence. Only in combination with it can cohesion (Water Element) take place. And only in combination with it can quivering (Wind Element) occur. Without the pressure of the Fire Element, therefore, the three coexisting elements cannot function.

The cold (Fire) element is responsible for the existence of all forms of water, beginning with that of the Great Oceans, the seas and the great layer of water that supports this Great Earth. It is this element that sustains them. The same element again is responsible for the existence of Mount *Meru*, Mount *Cakkavāla* and the Great Earth.

When one singles out *tejo* as one's object of contemplation, one concentrates only on coldness in cold objects, and heat in hot objects without letting in concepts of colour, form or size. The fact that either in heat or cold there exists not the slightest substance, even so much as an atom, is quite evident. This fact having been clearly comprehended, the meditator understands that what he has all along considered as big or grand forms, shapes and colours such as sun, moon, clouds, etc., are mere concepts, that they have no more real substance than reflections in a mirror or in clear water.

In contemplating Fire Element in one's body, one takes up such portion of the body as one's concentration can manage. When one

has fully understood the ultimate truth of this element in one's body it will become clear that all the living world also comes under the same truth.

(End of analysis of *tejo*.)

Analysis of Element of Motion (*vāyodhātu*)

If we watch a flame it is in motion; so also is the accompanying smoke. As Fire Element is responsible for the combustion, so also Wind Element assists in keeping the combustion in the form of a flame or living fire. The growth of the fire, of its heat and light, the quivering of the flame, the spread of smoke and the further catching of fire around itself, all are the functioning of *vāyo*, the Element of Motion or Wind Element.

Exactly the same function of Wind Element is there in all materiality. It is due to its pressure that heat and cold is transmitted throughout a given material object. If we kindle a fire we start it with a tiny piece of fire which we put to the fuel. The little fire catches on to the fuel assisted by Wind Element, which in fact is the motive force of Fire Element. This motive force carries the heat (of Fire Element) to all inflammable things around the original fire. When the motive force is weak, we assist with external motive force by using a fan or blow-pipe.

Heat has the accompanying motive force and so also has cold. Now, note carefully that heat is one ultimate fact and the accompanying motive force, another. The same with cold, of course. The property of heat or cold is a distinct property that belongs to the Fire Element. The motive force is another distinct property belonging to the Wind Element.

Wind Element, due to its motive force, is the vital energy of the three other coexistent elements of Earth, Water and Fire. Those three are borne by Wind Element to wherever it carries them. When the force gets very strong there is a gale. This force is present in air pillows or air mattresses, etc., where it provides the necessary function of a cushioning effect. This character of *vāyo* is called *vitthambhanalakkaṇā*, as mentioned in the scriptures.

In all physical phenomena beginning with Mount *Meru*, Mount

Cakkavāla and the rock formation of the Great Earth, the element of Cold (*sītatejo*), assisted by its motive force of Wind Element, arises every moment to sustain the prolonged existence of those physical phenomena until their total disintegration at the destruction of the universe after an aeon of time or *kappa*. (Contemplate this fact with mindfulness until you grasp it well.)

The arising of mind-originated materiality (*cittajarūpa*) throughout the body as a result of a certain consciousness (*citta*) that arises at the heart-base (*hadayavatthu*); the arising of temperature-originated materiality (*utujarūpa*), the dissemination of nutriment throughout the body when food is taken, the gradual growth and development of the embryo right from its ultra-microscopic liquid form (*kalala*) to a full-size living thing, the germination and growth of all vegetation – all these phenomena arise due to the motive force of *vāyo*. Try to visualize this fact in your mind's eye, contemplating the phenomenon of *vāyo* in all things animate or inanimate, from Mount *Meru*, Mount *Cakkavāla* and the Great Earth, until the mere property of motion becomes vivid. (Then contemplate the same truth in your body.) Contemplate it from head to foot. Here also, as with the other elements, the ultimate absence of form or substance – just like mirror-images – will become clear to your perception. Concepts of colour, form and shape; formerly accepted as truth by convention, will stand in the way. These are mere concepts (*paññatti*), not real, non-existent. They must be dispelled by penetrating knowledge (*ñāṇa*).

(End of analysis of *vāyo*.)

The Interdependent Nature of the Four Great Elements

The four properties, namely: (1) hardness, (2) cohesion, (3) heat or vital warmth, and (4) motion or motive force – are inherently different from one another. They exist together on hardness as a common base. They arise together, stand (momentarily) together, and vanish together. When hardness fails, the three other coexisting elements lose their base and vanish. When cohesion fails and the binding force disappears, then the three other elements disintegrate. When heat or cold fails, or the vital warmth goes out and the

function of sustaining life stops then the remaining three elements lose their vital force and die out. When the distending function of Wind Element fails, the remaining three lose support and collapse together.

Fire Element can quiver with its inherent heat or cold only when assisted by Wind Element. When the motive force of Wind fails, Fire Element also dies down in no time. Likewise, the hardness of Earth Element depends for its stability and support on Wind Element; when this support fails, hardness disappears. Cohesion also cannot do without the supporting function of Wind Element. This is how the Four Great Elements with their own properties are interdependent, how failure of one spells destruction of all.

The exact functioning of the Four Great Elements in things animate and inanimate, however, is too complex and subtle to understand; in fact it is simply incomprehensible (*acinteyya*). Their inherent powers also are similarly incomprehensible. Mastery over their nature through insight (in pursuing) the Buddha's Teaching (of the Eightfold Noble Path) leads to wisdom (*paṭivedha-ñāṇa*) which penetrates *Nibhāna*, also called supramundane wisdom (*lokuttara-vijjā-ñāṇa*). In the mundane sphere, a mastery of these elements entitles one to supernatural powers. A middling knowledge of them enables one to be proficient in science – medicine, chemistry, engineering, etc.

Of the Four Great Elements *tejo* is supreme. All physical phenomena, animate or inanimate, from the whole universe, the Great Earth and Water below the Earth's entire layer, down to smaller things, depend on *tejo* for their existence.

The full understanding of the powers of *tejo* lies within the province of the All-knowing Buddha.

(Here ends the exposition of the interdependence of the Four Great Elements.)

Analysis of Space* (*Ākāsa dhātu*)

The above-mentioned Four Great Elements, *Paṭhavī*, *Āpo*, *Tejo* and *Vāyo*, popularly known as Earth, Water, Fire and Wind respectively, arise either due to (*kamma*), or mind (*citta*), or temperature (*utu*), or nutriment (*āhāra*). On these four accounts the Four Elements arise together as groups or units of matter. Each group consists of the four elements. The element that separates these groups is called space (*ākāsa*), 'that by which an object is delimited' (*parrichedarūpaṃ*). Although the Four Great Elements come up together and perish together, only the elements constituting the same unit do so. The neighbouring units being separated by *ākāsa* are not affected. To the ordinary eye, mass or form is seen as preconceived shapes of living things or external physical objects. The fact of space in between (ultra-microscopic) material units, that take the form of such living things or objects, is not perceived. In all physical phenomena beginning with Mount *Meru*, Mount *Cakkavāla* and the Great Earth, being constituted by the Four Great Elements, there are the element of space interstices between every unit of matter. Thus in between all masses of materiality there are voids or space, comparable in principle to the open sky above the Earth. It is very important to gain a clear comprehension of this Element of Space because it is essential for the understanding of material units, which again is essential for the understanding of the (three) characteristics of all phenomena. To gain insight into the three characteristics of all phenomena, you need to contemplate space in all physical objects, animate or inanimate, and perceive its presence. The Element of Space (unlike the Four Great Elements) does not actually arise from some origin. (It has no objective reality.) It is only a delimiting element that makes its appearance whenever material units come into being due to the four causes stated above. Since it does not arise and vanish, one does not need to contemplate it for gaining insight into its impermanence, ill or not-self. Knowledge of the three characteristics of phenomena does not come from contemplating

* *Ākāsa* has sometimes been rendered as 'the void'.

ākāsa as an object in itself. Rather it needs to be properly perceived as a necessary condition for the understanding of the three characteristics of the Four Great Elements of Earth, Water, Wind and Fire.

(End of analysis of *Ākāsa dhātu*.)

Analysis of the Element of Consciousness (*Viññāṇa dhātu*)

Viññāṇa dhātu is the Element of Consciousness, that is, it is this element through which one knows the given sense objects. Consciousness is of six kinds, namely:-

- (1) Eye-consciousness or *Cakkhu-viññāṇa-dhātu*,
- (2) Ear-consciousness or *Sota-viññāṇa-dhātu*,
- (3) Nose-consciousness or *Ghāṇa-viññāṇa-dhātu*,
- (4) Tongue-consciousness or *Jivhā-viññāṇa-dhātu*,
- (5) Body-consciousness or *Kāya-viññāṇa-dhātu*,
- (6) Mind-consciousness or *Mano-viññāṇa-dhātu*,

Of these:

- (1) **Eye-consciousness** means the consciousness that arises by way of the eye when the eye comes into contact with visible objects.
- (2) **Ear-consciousness** means the consciousness that arises by way of the ear when the ear comes into contact with sounds.
- (3) **Nose-consciousness** means the consciousness that arises by way of the nose when the nostrils come into contact with smells.
- (4) **Tongue-consciousness** means the consciousness that arises by way of the tongue when the tongue comes into contact with tastes.
- (5) **Body-consciousness** means the consciousness that arises by way of the body when the body comes into contact with tactile objects. (Put in simple terms it is the sense of touch.)
- (6) **Mind-consciousness** means the consciousness that arises by way of the heart-base (*hadaya vatthu*) when the heart-base

comes into contact with mental objects, either good, such as faith (*saddhā*), morality or virtue (*sīla*), learning (*suta*), charity or giving (*cāga*) – or bad – such as greed (*lobha*), hatred or anger (*dosa*) delusion (*moha*).

Generally speaking, when the eye sees (i.e., comes into contact with) a visual object people think, “I see it”. This is in fact wrong view induced by attachment to Eye-consciousness. The fact of seeing is merely a distinct phenomenon (without any one who sees) and needs to be understood clearly through insight.

Likewise, the phenomena of hearing sounds, smelling odours, tasting flavours, and touching tactile objects, should be understood clearly through insight.

When the mind thinks thoughts, or knows things, people generally think, “I think of this or that” or “I know this or that”. This is in fact the wrong view of personality-belief (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*). The arising of thoughts is a distinct phenomenon and needs to be understood clearly through insight.

How this insight comes about will be explained now.

The physical body may be likened to a bad open sore, the six kinds of consciousness are like maggots that infest the sore at various spots. Since consciousness is a mental phenomenon you have to imagine it arising depending on the six sense-bases such as eye, ear, etc. (Another way:) Imagine the six sense-bases such as eye, ear, etc., as very clear patches of water, and the six kinds of consciousness as reflections appearing on the individual patches of water.

The above methods are to help visualize that sense data or sense-objects are distinct from, and external to the sense-bases. Although consciousness is imagined as some conceptual thing at first, after long-standing contemplation it will dawn on the mind that it is purely a mental state. Even if the mental states are not clearly recognized, and they appear as reflections on patches of clear water, or dew drops (falling on a piece of glass), it does not matter. The main purpose is to comprehend the phenomena in what is commonly said as ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’, ‘smelling’, ‘tasting’, ‘touching’ and ‘thinking’. If the imagined things (a sore and maggots; patches of water and reflections thereon, etc.) do not help dispel the personality-belief, and the deluded “I” still persists

in the happening of those six kinds of consciousness, insight is still far beyond you. Only when your earlier ingrained concept of, “I see it”, etc., loosens itself and the real occurrence of consciousness is properly comprehended, firmly grasped can you ascertain yourself that you have gained the Knowledge of being firmly settled about the *Dhammā*.

The arising and vanishing of phenomena take place at tremendous speed comparable to the phenomenon of lightning;

vijjhupādā va ākāse uppajjanti veyanti ca
(*Niddesa: Visuddhimagga*).

So you have to make yourself aware of the fact that phenomena arise and vanish rapidly within such fleeting moments as the blink of an eye.

This contemplation of impermanence, ill and not-self, is the way to break up the diehard concepts of permanence, pleasurable, and self or ego with their erroneous belief in a being, person, or a life. When the ephemeral character of all phenomena, not lasting even as long as the duration of a flash of lightning, is seen through, the truth that such phenomena are not at all reliable should become clear; and when this is thoroughly understood, the ill, the not-self, the not-person, the not-life of the self-same phenomena will automatically come to light. This understanding is no other than the Knowledge of being established in the *Dhamma*. The fleeting nature of phenomena is therefore aptly compared in the scriptures to a flash of lightning. The rapidity of the occurrence of mental phenomena is even far greater: their arisings and vanishings may be reckoned in hundreds of thousands of times within a flash of lightning. The rapidity is beyond human comprehension. Therefore it is not advisable to make such subtle phenomena one's object of contemplation. Try as one might, these phenomena will not be comprehended even after contemplating for a hundred or a thousand years. Instead of any ray of insight the meditator will be beset by more befuddlement and despair. For, as the scriptures say, mental phenomena take place in billions and trillions within the blink of an eye, or a flash of lightning, or of the snapping of one's fingers. Now, the duration of the blink of an eye itself is fleeting enough. To attempt to contemplate the occurrence

of mental phenomena to the billionth or trillionth part of that duration would therefore be sheer folly. That is why you should rest satisfied if you can comprehend the unreliable, transient character of all phenomena, which is the main purpose.

As for the exact nature of mental phenomena, the understanding of which is the domain of the All-knowing Buddha's Wisdom, one has only to accept the authority of the scriptures (as to their swiftness). All talk about contemplating the three characteristics of mental phenomena is mere humbug. It is never practical but only hearsay from the Scriptures. If someone were to try it, it would be a far cry from insight.

(End of analysis of *Vīññāṇa-dhātu*.)

A Brief Exposition of the First Light of the Buddha's Teaching

A fair understanding of the six elements – the Four Great Elements together with the element of space and the element of consciousness – that underlie all phenomena, internally within oneself and externally in all things beginning with Mount *Meru*, Mount *Cakkavāḷa* and the Great Earth, as explained above, establishes one in the *Dhamma*, the First or basic Light taught by the Buddha. Until one is so established one wallows helplessly in the dark quagmire of Stark Ignorance of the *Dhamma*. It therefore behoves one to strive for this Light which is the only worthy goal in having had the golden opportunity of hearing the Buddha's Teaching.

(End of the First Light of the Buddha's Teaching.)

A Detailed Exposition of the Knowledge in Comprehending the Law of Causality (*Paccaya-pariggaha ñāṇa*)

The second Light of the Buddha's Teaching refers to understanding the Law of Causality: (*paccaya*, cause, condition or origin; *pariggaha*, comprehending or taking possession). What causes material and mental phenomena to arise? What is the origin of these phenomena? What is the basic knowledge required about

this question to gain the Light of comprehending the Law of Causality?

The Four Causes for the Arising of Materiality

The Four Great Elements of Earth (*paṭhavī*), Water (*āpo*), Heat (*tejo*), and Wind (*vāyo*); and Space (*ākāsa*), these five material elements are conditioned by the four factors, namely, volitional acts (*kamma*), mind (*citta*), temperature (*utu*) and nutriment (*āhāra*). Further, they are conditioned by the six sense-bases (*vatthu*) and their respective sense-objects (*ārammaṇa*). So we have six basic elements which are caused or conditioned by six basic phenomena (i.e., the four conditions governing materiality **plus** (the set of) two conditions governing mentality). A good understanding of these phenomena is required for one to gain the Light of comprehending the Cause or Causality.

Now, each of the Four Great Elements, Earth, Water, Fire and Wind, arise by these four conditions: (1) Volitional acts or *Kamma*, (2) Mind, (3) Temperature and (4) Nutriment.

As for Space (*ākāsa dhātu*) since it is not caused, i.e., 'not born' (*jāti*) it does not have any arising (*uppāda*). It merely happens to exist to delimit those conditioned material units (*rūpa kalāpa*). Hence one should not look for the origin or cause of space. (In other words), we exclude space from our study of the Law of Causality.*

(1) *Kamma* as Origin

Of the four causes of origination, *Kamma* means good *kamma*, such as giving or morality (or virtue) etc., on the one hand, and bad *kamma* such as killing, stealing, etc., on the other, done in previous existences. The following material phenomena arise due to *Kamma*: (a) physical vitality (*jīvita*), (b) heart-base (*hadaya vatthu*), (c) female sex (*itthi bhāva*), (d) male sex (*pumhāva*), (e) eye-sensitivity (*cakkhu-pasāda*), (f) ear-sensitivity (*sota pasāda*),

**Ākāsa* (space) is a permanent *concept* (*nicca paññatti*), a subjective element which has no objective reality.

(g) nose-sensitivity (*ghāṇa pasāda*), (h) tongue-sensitivity (*jīvha pasāda*) and (i) body-sensitivity (*kāya pasāda*). All those material phenomena are conditioned by past *kamma* alone. For once *jīvita*, or physical vitality, is destroyed in the present existence no other present conditions – temperature, nutriment, or medicine or medicinal diet, – could restore it to the body. This body dies and it is conventionally said that the present existence expires and a new existence comes to arise. It is the same thing with the heart-base. When eye sensitivity is destroyed medicines or medicinal treatment cannot restore it; eye-sensitivity is lost forever. The same holds true for ear-sensitivity, nose-sensitivity, tongue-sensitivity, and body-sensitivity. Thus, the above-mentioned material phenomena, since their inception, are subject to favourable conditions and circumstances for their continued existence throughout their process of development. Once the process is interrupted, no amount of present efforts can restore them. That is why they are said to be the product or resultant of past *kamma* alone.

The same should be understood with regard to the Four Great Elements born of *kamma*.

(2) Mind (*citta*) as Origin

Mind (*citta*) is of three classes: (a) wholesome or moral (*kusala*), (b) unwholesome or immoral (*akusala*) and (c) indeterminate or un-moral (*ahyākata*).

- (a) Among the unwholesome classes of consciousness, we have greed, anger, hatred, delusion, conceit (*māna*), jealousy (*issā*), niggardliness or avarice (*macchhariya*), remorse or brooding (*kukkucca*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), etc.
- (b) Among the wholesome classes of consciousness there are: giving, morality, love (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy in others' wellbeing (*muditā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*), faith (*saddhā*), wisdom (*paññā*), concentration (*jhāna*) etc.
- (c) Among the indeterminate or unmoral class of consciousness there are: resultant consciousness (*vipāka*), kammically non-operative consciousness (*kiriya*), rebirth-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi*), passive states of consciousness (*bhavaṅga*), adverting (*āvajjana*), examination (*santīraṇa*), reception

(*sampaticchana*), registering (*tadārammaṇa*), decease (*cuti*), etc.

Another classification:

Mind or *citta* or consciousness is of these three classes: consciousness in bodily actions, in verbal actions and in mental actions.

Of those three classes: consciousness in bodily actions varies with the manner of physical movement such as going, standing, sitting, lying down, bending, stretching, etc. Consciousness in going means the volition that activates the particular deportment. The activating consciousness that brings the foot to make the first step is followed by that which brings the other foot to make another step, and so each step is directed by each consciousness so that as long as this type of consciousness is arising successively, the steps are made successively. Likewise in all bodily movements, every little bit of movement is brought about by each type of consciousness. As an illustration, take a railway engine. Each puff of steam from inside the boiler turns the machinery in a specific stroke, and each ball of smoke escapes from the chimney. Every stroke of the machine's turning, every bulge of smoke at the chimney is the work of each specific puff of steam. The same principle is observable in other steam engines such as in power-generating plants and steamers.

In the same manner when you walk, every step that is made is on account of each motivating consciousness accompanied by its own set of physical phenomena. The consciousness that motivates the first step vanishes at the end of the step when the physical phenomena of that step dies away. A fresh consciousness arises for the next step, bringing in a fresh set of physical phenomena. This second step ended, the physical phenomena therein vanish, and the motivating consciousness is no more. In this way when a hundred steps are made a hundred types of consciousness and a hundred sets of physical phenomena (arise and) vanish. When a thousand steps are made, a thousand types of consciousness and material states (arise and) vanish. The mentality and materiality pertaining to the outgoing step have no effect on the succeeding step. They perish the moment the particular step is made. At each step that is made fresh motions occur throughout the body. All

these motions represent fresh arisings of materiality due to fresh arisings of consciousness. Every day we make innumerable bodily movements: the head, the limbs and all the smaller parts of the body move in various manners; the exhaling, the inhaling, the blinking of the eyes, the movement of the lips, etc., take place all the time, each of which has its own consciousness to account for the particular motion. This is how consciousness in bodily actions brings about physical phenomena expressing themselves as bodily actions.

Consciousness in verbal actions brings about physical phenomena expressing themselves as verbal actions. Whether we speak or cry, laugh or shout, every minute utterance is the work of a particular consciousness. For instance, we say:

“Iti pi so bhagavā araham sammāsambuddho” each syllable – *l, ti, pi,* (etc.) – is motivated by its own consciousness. If you say in English: “Homage to the Buddha”, each of the syllables, – *Hom – age – to –* (etc.) – is caused to be uttered by its own motivating consciousness. Observe this fact carefully. And also observe that at the end of each syllable the motivating consciousness for it vanishes. This is how consciousness in verbal actions brings about physical phenomena (audible sounds) in verbal actions.

Consciousness in mental actions brings about physical phenomena expressing themselves as visible aspects of one’s mood, generally noticeable in the eyes, facial expression and demeanour. Hence we can distinguish anger from the face that has assumed, under angry impulse (consciousness), a reddish aspect. So also the face assumes distinct expressions under the impulse of kindness, ill-will, goodwill, and so on. Observe carefully that each mental action is behind each material phenomenon that finds its outward expression.

This then is how the Four Great Elements that constitute physical phenomena change millions of times under the impulses of consciousness that arise and vanish in as many times each day in a given individual.

Whereas the physical phenomena in walking is conditioned by the consciousness of walking – i.e., the thought-impulses that bring about bodily movement called walking – the generality of the people think someone goes, a woman goes, a man goes, he goes, I

go, etc.. This persistent view of the going as necessarily done by some person, i.e., the goer, is the Stark Ignorance of Causality.

The truth is that in the bodily movement of going, the consciousness that motivates it is no person or being, no woman or man, not he, not I, not human, not a *deva*. It is only the element of consciousness (*citta or viññāṇa*). The act of going caused by the consciousness of going, is physical phenomena set in motion. Apart from mentality-materiality there exists no person, no being, no personal entity, no soul, no individual life, no woman, or man, neither he nor I, that goes. So also there is the coming but no one who actually comes; there is the standing but no one who stands; there is the sitting but no one who sits; there is the sleeping but no one who sleeps; there is the speaking but no one who speaks. In any act there is only the action but no one who acts. There is no doer, no subject by way of a living entity. And there is no creator. There is only the arising of physical phenomena expressing themselves as going, coming, sitting, sleeping, speaking, etc., under the motivating force or impulse of consciousness which is the true cause of all such arisings. To be able to discern this truth is Knowledge in comprehending the Law of Causality.

(End of the arising of the Four Great Elements due to consciousness).

(3) Temperature (*utu*) as Origin

Temperature that causes the arising of the Four Great Elements, i.e. the physical phenomena, means cold (*sītatejo*) and heat (*unhatejo*). The element of cold causes cold material to arise; the element of heat causes hot material to arise. In the cold season the element of cold prevails making the body cold. In the hot season the element of heat prevails making the body warm. In the rainy season there is a mixture of cold and hot elements around us so that by night the body is cold and by day it is warm. In the morning before noon the body is warm; in the afternoon it is cold. When we stay or go about in the sun the body gets hot, we feel warm and there is perspiration. In the shade the body is cool, we do not feel warm, and it is comfortable. While sleeping or sitting the body is cool. While standing or walking it gets warm. When there is exertion – carrying things, digging or chopping things, etc., – the

body gets warm. And when the body rests it gets cool again. Thus within the day innumerable physical phenomena, cold or hot, arise in a person, depending on circumstances, all due to temperature. Observe carefully within yourself the arisings of hot or cold materiality which occur in turns due to changes in temperature.

This is how the Four Great Elements, all physical phenomena, are born of temperature.

While cold material is arising due to cold temperature, or hot material is arising due to hot temperature, if one gets no idea that materiality is taking turns from cold to hot on account of change in temperature from cold to hot, then he is under the Stark Ignorance of the Law of Causality. From such ignorance there arises in him the wrong view that someone exists who does this or that (*kāraṇa diṭṭhi*) or a firm belief in a doer. There also arises in him the wrong view that someone exists who suffers or experiences this or that (*vedaka diṭṭhi*). When one believes in the existence of a doer, one considers of oneself, “If I wish to enjoy cool, I can make myself cool”; or “If I wish to make myself warm, I can do so”. (Corollary): when one believes of another who begets the action of a doer, one considers as for oneself: “As a result of my own efforts to get cool, I am now enjoying the cool”; or “As a result of my own efforts to get warm, I am now enjoying the warmth”.

“Due to the meritorious deeds done in my previous lives, I am now endowed with high birth, beauty, wealth, etc.”; “due to unmeritorious deeds done in my previous lives, I am now born an outcast, ugly, disease-ridden, a nonentity, poor, etc.”; “for what he has committed he has to suffer its consequences”; “for what I have committed I have to suffer its consequences”. In all such statements, ‘**who does** this or that thing’ indicates belief in the wrong view of the existence of a person, a doer or a subject of an act. And ‘**who suffers**’ indicates belief in the existence of a person, a sufferer or an object of an act. When someone says: “I did the cultivating, so I reap my harvest”, the belief in the existence of the person who cultivates is the wrong view of the existence of a doer. When the Light of the Law of Causality is attained, all activities are seen in their true states, as mere physical occurrences taking place due to changes in temperature. On attaining this Knowledge, belief in a doer or a creator or the act of God’s Creation dissolves.

(End of exposition of Temperature as Origin of physical phenomena).

(4) Nutriment (*Āhāra*) as Origin

Nutriment that is the origin of the Four Great Elements, i.e., all materiality, refers to food that is taken daily. That two square meals a day are required for man, and that certain intakes of food are required by cows, buffaloes, horses, elephants, etc., of the animal kingdom, is commonplace. Consider in yourself, as well as in other living beings, how lack of food causes certain noticeable physical characteristics, and how a timely meal causes other noticeable physical characteristics. Hunger causes, as everyone knows, physical weakness; a well-fed stomach causes a sense of physical wellbeing. Wrong food causes sickness which is manifested in a sick body. The taking of medicine or medicinal diet causes sickness to disappear, which is also manifested in a cured and healthy body. Sickness due to food and taking of medicine or dietary food is also interrelated with temperature, so that the dual cause of nutriment and temperature should be noted here.

Even though the plain fact is: the lack of food causes the body to get weak, feeble, tired and listless; the taking of proper food at a proper hour satisfies hunger, causes the body to get strong, full of vitality, able and fit, yet most people, being grossly ignorant of the truth, are deluded into thinking in terms of a **self** such as, “**I** ate, so **I** am full, **I** feel strong, vigorous, fine; my hunger is satisfied.”

When this delusion about a personal identity, with **I** in the centre of everything, is discarded as being false, and the truth about the ‘nutriment-origination of physical phenomena’ is comprehended – i.e., when there is a lack of nutriment, physical phenomena get weak and disabled; and when there is a supply of nutriment physical phenomena get strong and able – this is the correct view of the Four Great Elements that make up all materiality. This is Knowledge in Comprehending the Law of Causality.

(Here ends the exposition of the origination of the Four Great Elements due to the four basic causes.)

The Mental Element or *Viññāṇa*

Viññāṇa or consciousness arises on account of the dual phenomena of base (*vatthu*) and its relevant object (*ārammaṇa*), as follows:-

The Six Sense-bases (*vatthu*)

By sense base (*vatthu*) we mean:-

- (1) the eye sensitivity which is the base of visual sentience (*cakkhu-pasāda-rūpaṃ*); *
- (2) the ear sensitivity which is the base of auditory sentience (*sota-pasāda-rūpaṃ*);
- (3) the nose sensitivity which is the base of the faculty of smelling (*ghāṇa-pasāda-rūpaṃ*);
- (4) the tongue sensitivity which is the base of the faculty of tasting (*jivhā-pasāda-rūpaṃ*);
- (5) the body sensitivity which is the base of the faculty of bodily sensation or touch (*kāya-pasāda-rūpaṃ*);
- (6) the heart-basis (*hadaya-vatthu*).

These are the six sense bases.

The Sense-objects are these six:-

- (1) Colour (*vaṇṇa*) which is the visual object for eye-consciousness;
- (2) Sound (*sadda*) which is the auditory object for ear-consciousness;
- (3) Smell (*gandhārammaṇa*) which is the object of smelling for nose-consciousness;
- (4) Taste (*rasārammaṇa*) which is the object of taste for tongue-consciousness;
- (5) Tactile objects such as heat or cold, soft or rough, etc., which are the objects of touch for body-consciousness; and
- (6) Thoughts of an infinite range (*dhammārammaṇa*) which are the objects of mind-consciousness.

*With respect to U Tin U's translation "the organ of visual sentience" of "*Cakkhu pasāda rūpa*" I must say that there are two types of *cakkhu*, namely the eye-sensitivity (*pasāda cakkhu*) and data of the eye (*sasamhāra cakkhu*). Of them "the organ of visual sentience" is really the latter; but Sayadaw's Burmese word "Akyidhat" means the former. Ven. Sayadaw U Nyanika.

How Consciousness (*Viññāṇa*) arises

Consciousness is conditioned by the respective sensitivity and its object in the following ways:-

- (1) Eye-consciousness (*cakkhuviññāṇa*) arises on the dual condition of the eye sensitivity; the physical basis of seeing (*cakkhuvatthu*), and some visual object (*rūpārammaṇa*);
- (2) Ear-consciousness (*sotaviññāṇa*) arises on the dual condition of the ear sensitivity, the physical basis of hearing (*sotavatthu*), and some sound, the object of hearing (*sotārammaṇa*);
- (3) Nose-consciousness (*ghāṇaviññāṇa*) arises on the dual condition of the nose sensitivity, the physical basis of smelling (*ghāṇavatthu*) and some odour, the object of smelling (*ghāṇārammaṇa*);
- (4) Tongue-consciousness (*jivhāviññāṇa*) arises on the dual condition of the tongue sensitivity, the physical basis of tasting (*jivhāvatthu*), and some taste, the object of tasting (*rasārammaṇa*);
- (5) Body-consciousness (*kāyaviññāṇa*) arises on the dual condition of the body sensitivity, the physical basis of touch (*kāyavatthu*) and some tactile object, (*phoṭṭhabhārammaṇa*);
- (6) Mind-consciousness (*manoviññāṇa*) arises on the dual condition of the heart-basis, the physical basis of mind (*hadayavatthu*) and objects of thought (*dhammārammaṇa*).

Herein mind-element (*manodhātu*) is deemed to be included in mind-consciousness-element (*manoviññāṇadhātu*) – that is to say, in a brief way.

Further Explanation and Examples

When the eye comes into contact with a visual object, the impact produces in the eye-base, eye-consciousness which in common usage is 'seeing' the (colour) object. A ready example is the reflection of a face in a mirror. Herein, the smooth surface of the mirror may be likened to the eye-base which is capable of visual sentience; the face reflected in the mirror is like the visual object. As the image of your face falls on the surface of the mirror it is reflected in the mirror. So also, as the eye-sensitivity of the eye comes into contact with some visual object within the range of the

eye, eye-consciousness arises. When your face turns away from the mirror, the reflection of your face in the mirror disappears. Similarly, when the eye turns away from the visual object, eye-consciousness disappears. You say you do not see it now. If you turn it towards the object again, eye-consciousness arises again. And if you turn it away again, it (eye-consciousness) disappears again.

Now, eye-consciousness or the consciousness of seeing is a phenomenon that arises only while the eye is in contact with the object. When there is no contact no eye-consciousness can arise in which case you say you do not see it. So what is called seeing is only the function of eye-consciousness, which arises, in its natural state of things (*dhammatā*), due to contact between eye and visual object. If there is no eye, or no sensitivity of the eye, no seeing is possible. On the other hand, if there is no visual object within the range of the eye-sensitivity, also, no seeing is possible – there is nothing to see. We may note, then, that what is called seeing, or the arising of eye-consciousness, is a temporary phenomenon – only a momentary occurrence (*āgantukadhātu*) – that is occasioned in the eye-base by the occurrence of contact between eye and visual object.

So also:

The arising of ear-consciousness or hearing takes place occasionally as and when the ear-sensitivity in the ear and sound come into contact.

The arising of nose-consciousness or smelling takes place occasionally as and when the nose-sensitivity in the nostrils and odour come into contact.

The arising of tongue-consciousness or tasting takes place occasionally as and when the tongue-sensitivity in the tongue and taste or sapidity come into contact.

The arising of body-consciousness or sensitivity of touch takes place throughout the body from head to foot, externally as well as internally, occasionally as and when the body-sensitivity and tactile objects of sorts – rough or soft, hot or cold, etc., – come into contact. The body-sensitivity is wide and complex : it may be just skin deep or it may be felt from the marrow to say nothing of an assortment of aches, cramps, itchings, etc., now hot here or now

cold there, and so on.

The arising of mind-consciousness takes place in the heart-basis due to its contact with past mental objects such as:

- (a) past efficient (or potent) action (*kamma*), or
 - (b) a symbol (sign) of that past action or (*kamma nimitta*)
 - (c) a sign of the tendencies for further rebirth (*gati nimitta*);
- or due to contact with present mental objects, good or bad, such as greed, hatred, etc.; and as a result consciousness may be in a passive state (*bhavaṅga citta*); or unwholesome states such as greed, hatred, delusion, ill-will or covetousness (avarice); or wholesome states such as faith, knowledge; or simply random or idle thoughts (*vitakka*)¹.
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- (i) “Thought-conception (*vitakka*) is the laying hold of thought, giving it attention. Its characteristic consists in fixing consciousness to the object” (Nyanatiloka’s Buddhist Dictionary. Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1950), Ed.
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- (ii) First of all, *Vitakka*, generally speaking, is different in its phase and function, as to mundane and supramundane, literally strict sense, and common usage. U Shwe Zan Aung gives an extensive explanation regarding *Cetasika*, especially *Vitakka*. Compendium of Philosophy (*Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*) transl. by U Shwe Zan Aung, B.A. (P.T.S. 1910, p.238 et seq.).

In commentaries such as the ‘*Visuddhimagga*’, the ‘*Aṭṭhasālinī*’, the ‘*Abhidhammatthaviḥḥāvanī*’ etc. the common characteristics of *Vitakka* is given like this : ‘*Cetaso abhiniropanalakkhaṇa*’ (directing and lifting the *citta* and *cetasikas* towards the objects).

In the higher states of mind *Vitakka* serves as an initial application, lifting up *citta* towards a wisdom which is conducive to extirpation of defilements in the case of Path and Fruition (*Magga/Phala*) and directing *citta* towards ecstatic concentration (*Appana Samādhi*) which is capable of keeping hindrances off, in the case of *Jhāna* or Sublime (*Mahaggata*) fields.

But in general common usage *Vitakka* means applied or speculative thought or thinking over various aspects of divergent objects (*Nanappakaraparikkappa*), or ‘day-dream’

in the most colloquial language.

As regards temperaments *Vitakka*, as one type of '*cariya*' called "Speculative Temperament" is explained in detail in the Path of Purification (see pp 102-112). In the Burmese version of Ledi Sayadaw's "Alin Kyan", this sort of *Vitakka* is meant, so your rendering "random thought" and "idle thought" is also right. But "Simply wool-gathering" I do not think to be a suitable phrase to convey such meaning. Ven. Sayadaw U Nyanika.

All those arisings of the five kinds of consciousness must be understood, as with the arising of eye-consciousness, on the simile of the mirror image.

The inability to comprehend the truth that the six kinds of consciousness arise each due to momentary contacts between the sense organs or sense-bases and their respective objects; which is commonly spoken of as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking and which are actually separate and distinctive phenomena covering the whole set of the five aggregates, is Stark Ignorance of the *Dhamma*, the First Stark Ignorance. The lack of understanding of the origin of the six kinds of consciousness, that they arise on the dual cause of sense-base and sense-object, is Stark Ignorance of Causality; the Second Stark Ignorance. From this ignorance arises the wrong view of a doer or a creator. This view firmly holds that for all actions there exists a doer, a creator. In other words, all existence means persons and their doings. Personal entity such as I or he/she, etc., is responsible for seeing, hearing, etc. "I see with my eye", "I hear with my ears" – (as taught when children) – are taken literally by the adult. This belief is the only truth such an ignorant one holds : he rejects any other cause. All such views that tenaciously hold to the idea of a doer or a creator are wrong.

The wrong view of *kāraṇa diṭṭhi* (in short) is the view that all the other perceptions – hearing, tasting, touching, knowing, thinking – are also actions done by someone. Without some person **doing** these things they cannot take place. There is a **person** who sees, who hears, etc. This view does not accept that these perceptions arise simply through the dual cause of sense-bases

and sense-objects.

One who comprehends the phenomena of the six kinds of consciousness that arise due to the dual cause of sense-organs or sense-bases and their respective objects – appearing as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, knowing, [and thus] thinking – attains the Knowledge of Causality, The Second Great Light. This Light dispels once and for all the Stark Ignorance of Causality and the wrong view of a doer or creator as the cause of life. Where one clings to the belief that it is due to God, I see, I hear, etc., not knowing or not accepting the phenomena of the dual cause of the six kinds of consciousness one also errs in the wrong view of a doer/creator. The same ignorance lies at the root of the Creator concept, too; it should be noted.

(End of Detailed Explanation of the Knowledge in Comprehending the Law of Casualty).

A Detailed Explanation of the Knowledge in Realizing the Three Characteristics (*lakkhaṇa-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*)

What is the basic minimum understanding about the Three Characteristics so as to gain the Knowledge of the Three Characteristics? What are the fundamental phenomena that need to be understood?

When one understands the three characteristics inherent in the six basic elements (*dhātu*) described above, namely : *paṭhavī dhātu*, *āpo dhātu*, *tejo dhātu*, *vāyo dhātu*, *ākāsa dhātu* and *viññāṇa dhātu*, one is said to have gained the Knowledge of the Three Characteristics.

Of the five material elements among those six (*viññāṇa* being a mental element), *paṭhavī dhātu* is the key. For it is the very basis of all materiality. It is on this element that the Great Earth with the great oceans, mountains, countries and human settlements and structures are founded. If one can comprehend the impermanence of the Great Earth and visualise its crumbling, disintegration and vanishing (in one's mind), the ephemeral nature of all the countries, cities and human settlements is seen without further effort. Similarly, when the ultimate fact about *paṭhavī* as the basis of all materiality, including the elements of Water, Wind and Fire, is

understood as to its unstable, ephemeral character, its constant state of decay, the remaining elements constituting all material phenomena are seen without further effort.

The Three Characteristics

Now, to deal with the Three Characteristics : The Characteristic of Impermanence (*anicca lakkhana*) is that which arises momentarily, only to vanish as soon as having risen. It is called *anicca* because it is in the nature of decaying and destruction (*khayaṭṭhena aniccam*).

The characteristic of Dreadfulness (*dukkha lakkhana*) is the danger that lurks in the alluring attractions of material things. Just as a leper in advanced stages does not dare to partake of rich delicious food but must decline any offer of it, so also the wise are not attracted by material things. For the apparent greatness and pleasures of human or celestial existence are all fraught with the inherent danger of defilements which keep one in the recurring process of ageing, decay and death. It is called *dukkha* because of its nature of danger and dreadfulness (*bhayaṭṭhena dukkham*).

The characteristic of insubstantiality (*anatta lakkhana*) is the absence of substance in materiality. No substance exists that can be called the essence of a person. As we have seen in our discussion on Knowledge in being firmly settled about the *Dhamma*, the ultimate truth of materiality and mentality disproves the existence of a person – just as the basic structural materials are only timber or bamboo and not house or monastery or temple or rest-house or pandal. It is called *anatta* because it lacks substance or essence (*asāraṭṭhena anatta*).

Of those Three Characteristics, the Characteristic of *dukkha* or woefulness or ill, is exhausted only when one attains *Arahatta Magga*, the fourth and final stage of the Path-Knowledge. The other two are exhausted at the lower stages. Of these two, the worldling must first of all grapple with Personality-belief, the belief in 'I', which is deluded and erroneous. For this he must necessarily comprehend the not-self character (*anatta lakkhana*) of all compounded things. This not-self character is in fact implicit in the impermanent character :

(*Anicca saññino meghiya anattasañña saṇṭhāti*).

So I will now explain the impermanent character clearly with a view to throwing light on the 'not-self' character.

Examining *Tejo dhātu*

In discussing the Knowledge of being firmly settled about the *Dhamma* we have been acquainted with the six basic elements of materiality. We shall now begin with examining *Tejo dhātu*, the Element of Heat or the Fire Element, its impermanence and not-self (no-essence) characteristics. *Tejo* comprises heat and cold which are known by the world as such, but which are primary elements that belong to *Tejo*. Now, heat and cold are of opposite nature. Each is the antithesis of the other. When cold prevails heat is absent and *vice versa*. What the world calls a being or a person is born only once and dies only once. There is no repeated arising of a person during his lifetime nor repeated vanishings or cessations. *Tejo* which is a basic element in the body of all living things, on the other hand, arises quite a number of times in a day, and vanishes in as many times. We speak of : "Oh, now it is no longer warm; it is getting cool"; or "it is no longer cold; it is getting warm now" – and these we say even during the course of any single day. That being so, *Tejo* arises and vanishes in its own way, whereas what is believed to be a person, an individual, does not have the same arisings and vanishings. No identity exists between *Tejo* and the assumed personal entity of a being. So it is erroneous in the *Abhidhamma* sense to speak of **someone** feeling warm or cold when *tejo* becomes hot or cold. It gets warm or cold as a mere phenomenon of *Tejo*; no one is feeling warm or cold in the ultimate sense. For apart from that phenomenon there is no person, no personal entity.

Since the so-called person or being does not in the ultimate sense correspond to *tejo*, a basic element with its own characteristic properties, it is evident that neither heat nor cold is a person, a being. Neither of them connotes a person, a being. If it were so, then the same phenomenon of arisings and vanishings should hold true both to *tejo* and to the so-called person. If *tejo* were a person then it should also, like the so-called person, decease only once in a person's lifetime. As a matter of fact, *tejo* arises and vanishes many times a day and also turns from hot to cold every now and

then. The changes are also noticeable. We know when it is hot, and we know when the heat vanishes. So also we know when it is cold, and we know when the cold vanishes. If this phenomenon of hot and cold were indeed a person then we would consider that that person arises and vanishes every time heat or cold arises and vanishes. That however is not the case. While noticing that heat and cold arise many times and vanish many times a day, we generally do not consider that a person arises and vanishes in as many times a day. We hold the view that a person, once born, dies only once in his lifetime. So the incongruity is plain enough. Heat or cold cannot be one and the same thing as a person. Heat or cold do not belong to a person; they cannot be called the substance of a person. They are not person, not self. They are merely the Element of *Tejo*.

This is the impermanent and the not-self character of *Tejo*.

The fact of the numerous vanishings, even in the course of a day, is the character of impermanence (*aniccalakkhaṇa*). Since material phenomena have the inherent character of constant decay and vanishing it is not something substantial that can be called a person or a being. It is a vain thing that does not exist really. Hence it has the character of voidness, not-self (*anattalakkhaṇa*).

By saying that there is no substance we mean that if the phenomenon of heat or cold be taken as a person, then one is assuming that phenomenon as a substance. In that case one believes that heat or cold represents a personal entity. In other words, one believes in the existence of a self (*atta*). Now, if heat or cold were a person that has a 'self', then either of them should remain unchanged till his death. The fact is that heat or cold changes every moment, regardless of the so-called person who has no control over it. Since that 'person' cannot rely on heat or cold as his own self (*atta*), it is evident that heat or cold has no self (*anatta*).

Certain beings live a hundred years. The heat-and-cold in such a person does not remain constant throughout the hundred years of his life. It does not remain so even for ninety years, nor for eighty years, nor for seventy years, —, ten years, ———, five years, four years, nor one year. Therefore it is clear that heat or cold is not his own self. It is not a self at all. I have repeated myself but then this is a very subtle matter that must be grasped. Bear on this

point with all your mind and strive to gain insight.

(End of discussion on *Tejo dhātu*).

The Origination and Character of the Four Great Elements in Combination

The four great elements of Earth, Water, Wind and Fire have been compared to reflections that appear in a mirror. They may be likened to a rainbow appearing while sunlight is passing through a vapoury sky. The emphasis is on their ephemeral character. They arise due to the four main causes – *Kamma*, mind, temperature and nutriment – and vanish due to the same causes. If that transient nature of all materiality has been grasped, when one contemplates on one's body, the same phenomena will be observed. Not the blink of an eye passes without the arisings of fresh materiality occurring there, only to decay and disappear as soon as arisen. Those arisings and vanishings take place not unlike the frothing, turbulent, steamy water in a big boiler where the froth forms and disappears in no time. Just as a confused succession of bubbles are formed and are dying out, so also the arisings and vanishings of the Four Great Elements in the body will be discerned, all caused and conditioned by the four main factors of *Kamma*, etc., of which the role of nutriment will be seen most vividly.

Conditioned by *kamma*, mind, temperature and nutriment, there arise in the body the element of hardness called *Pathavī* or Earth Element; the element of cohesion called *Āpo* or Water Element; the element of life-sustaining heat called *Tejo* or Fire Element; and the element of motion and support called *Vāyo* or Wind Element. None of the four elements possesses any substance even so much as an atom. All are mere properties or functions. Therefore when any one of them decays all of them are destroyed at once. If the Element of Fire goes out, the qualities of hardness, cohesion, sustaining heat and motion die out instantaneously. They cannot survive even for the blink of an eye. If the Earth Element fails, all the elements lose their basis and so the qualities of cohesion, heat or cold, motion or distension, all disappear. Watch these happening in your body, closely.

The decaying materiality is instantly replaced by successive arisings of fresh matter at such a rapid rate that tens of thousands

of changes take place within the blink of an eye, or a flash of lightning. The rapidity cannot be visible to the physical eye. The arisings and vanishings going on in a state of flux can only be discerned through insight, contemplating their ultimate nature as explained above. In this state of flux, seen in mental perception, every movement represents the change taking place between the old and the new. To the physical eye, an apparently permanent object is seen as making no movements. If one is not wiser than what the eye can see one is still a far cry from the ultimate truth – a point that needs to be taken to heart.

When the four main causes that bring about the arising of the properties of hardness, cohesion, etc., of the Earth Element, Water Element, etc., – undergo a change, the co-existent Fire Element fails, which brings about the instant cessation of all materiality that make up a given unit of materiality. How this comes about will be explained now.

Fire, as we know it from everyday experience, arises dependent on some other matter and consumes that matter. That is the very nature of fire. So also Fire Element as an ultimate fact of materiality arises dependent on the three other Elements of hardness, cohesion and support; and consumes them all in no time. Fire that burns on garbage burns it up into ashes instantly. Fire that burns on oil burns up its fuel-oil. So also fire that burns on kerosene consumes the kerosene. Whatever fuel the fire happens to be fed on, it devours it all at once. Much in the same way, the Element of Fire that burns in all beings throughout the body devours co-existent Elements, and this process takes place very rapidly all the time without pause. More particularly, the devouring of nutriment is more voracious. That being the case, all materiality, be it the Element of Earth or the Element of Water, cannot last even as long as the blink of an eye or a flash of lightning. Within such short moments they all vanish forever, hundreds of thousands of times. Every such decaying materiality is instantly replaced so that the growth and development of childhood into adulthood is made possible.

In the quest for truth you have to try and visualise in your mental faculty the incessant phenomena of decay throughout your body. If you can visualise the state of flux in you quite vividly, you will perceive vividly how the whole body is made up of new arisings

or origination of materiality as well as the constant decay, the truth of the impermanence of all things.

A lamp with a fuel-can containing one viss of kerosene burns up the whole one viss before it dies out. Before the can is empty someone refills it with fuel. So long as this refuelling is kept up the fuel-can does not seem diminished in its contents; nor does the flame appear to have diminished in intensity. Yet the fact stands that both the fuel and the flame feeding on it are dying out every moment. If it were otherwise there would have been no need for replenishing the oil. If, supposing the lamp is kept alight the whole night, and fifty viss of kerosene oil is being used up, this amount is evidently what has been consumed by the fire. The fact of the flame consuming its fuel is noticeable to the keen observer. The passing moments of the flame getting weaker before the fuel is replenished as it gets low, is observable too. And it is everybody's knowledge that to keep the lamp alight the whole night it costs some considerable amount of kerosene.

The same holds true with living things. It is the regular meals that supply the fuel for the body. A meal provides the necessary fuel for a certain number of hours keeping the body whole after which the pinch of hunger comes to be felt. After some time without food the body cannot function. As the decay of the body is so fast, so also the fresh arising of materiality, replacing the old, also is equally fast. This rapid process of the necessity of fresh matter to replace the worn-out and deceased matter, forces living beings to be in constant search of food. That is why the task of keeping this mind/body process going is the most serious task, a compulsive action that is not only demanding but often exacting.

Imagine the amount of food produced in our Southern Island Continent (*Jambudīpa*), cereals, grains, and other edible crops, in the course of one year, and apportion it into monthly quotas for consumption by the population; and then break it down into daily requirements. Think of the magnitude of the daily food consumption. It represents the scale of material replenishment that is being met every day. This enormity of the daily food intake required to keep ourselves alive, so that the material phenomenon inside us is kept regularly replenished will indicate the enormous rate of decay that is overtaking us.

Think of the law of the jungle, the law of “fish eat fish”, all reflecting the fundamental fact of keeping oneself fed so as to live. Think of the human drudgery, day in and day out, in eking out one’s livelihood, amidst all sorts of struggles; the sweating away at one’s job; the planning and schemings, the travel and expeditions, the arguments and haggings; the disputes and fights, the security and precautions, the frettings and fumings, the stress and strain, the cares and woes – all these just for the sake of preserving one’s precious little life. If one can contemplate all these, down to their root-cause, the dire necessity of sustaining the body by providing fresh fuel in place of the consumed fuel will be realised. The compulsiveness of keeping oneself alive through nutriment will be seen. When one is able to understand this compulsive nature of staying alive through fresh fuelling, then the *rate* of consumption of what has been fed into the body will be appreciated. Then the ephemeral character of the body will be seen; the utter helplessness will be seen; the sheer absence of self will be seen.

In short, all the cares that beset living things in the world are due to the rapidity of arising and decay of all material phenomena, big or small, taking place in the body. This is the natural order of things in their origination – the impermanence and not-self character in the natural state of things – which needs to be comprehended.

Attachment to one’s body is usually strong. Everybody would like to live a hundred years, or even a thousand years (if possible). This entails sustaining the ever-decaying body by means of fresh fuel so that fresh materiality is caused to arise to take the place of decayed matter. If one comprehends the arising of fresh materiality, due to the fresh feedings in the natural state of the body, and realises its transience and not-self character, lacking reality or substance even in the natural form, then it will not be too difficult to comprehend the altered condition (*vikati*) of the arising of materiality, the transience in the altered state of things, the dissolution (*bhijjanam*), the diminution (*khayo*), the destruction (*vayo*), the emptiness or insubstantiality (*asāro*) of the altered state of things.

By altered conditions that arise (*vikati jāti*) is meant the

occurrence of ailments and diseases, dangers, enemies, suffering from violence (*dando*) and accidents or misfortunes (*upaddavo*).

That the materiality that composes the body is subject to the ravages of all those dangers and mishaps, and that they are decaying and dying out incessantly, should also be seen. This is called “impermanence due to extraneous causes” (*vikati anicca*). So also the nature of insubstantiality on the same account (*vikati anatta*) should be seen. The fresh arisings occur incessantly; there is no lapse between the decayed matter and fresh matter, the process is continuous every moment. Therefore it is possible for desirable materiality and undesirable materiality to arise in turns at any moment, throughout the whole body. And since the deterioration and decay is also occurring very swiftly, sudden turns from being well to unwell, being pleasant to unpleasant, are also possible. In fact there is never a moment when such turns from good to bad cannot occur. For every moment is filled with arisings and vanishings. All fresh arisings are, in the ultimate sense, fresh births (*jāti*). When, for instance, we say we have an eye-sore, or an ear-sore, this is the arising or birth of some unpleasant feeling.

The disappearance is called Impermanence (*anicca*), for what has arisen does not last even a moment but deteriorates, decays and dies out. In common usage we say, “The cold is no more, it is gone”. These are but instances of Impermanence. By not-self (*anatta*) is meant the unsubstantial character of all things, not actually existing but only in a state of flux. In common parlance we hear such expressions as: “Pleasure does not last, it is only **momentary**”; or “The cold lasts **just a while**”; “Beauty is **not lasting**”; or “The stiffness is **gone now**”; etc. All these expressions denote the transient nature of all compounded things.

In this body countless factors are ever present to bring to extinction all good or bad, i.e. desirable or undesirable, states, and these factors are both intrinsic as well as extrinsic. The Buddha calls *Paṭhavī*, Earth Element, the bad snake with the poisonous mouth (*kaṭṭhamukha*). As the snake bites the tip of a toe the poison instantly reaches the head, making the victim unconscious. The whole body undergoes a tremendous change from the normal condition to a searing physical condition all at once. Not a trace of the normal healthy physical condition is left in them. The whole

body is now filled with a frightfully heated physical phenomena. It may be likened to a big bomb filled with (say), fifty viss of high explosive, which, when exposed to a tiny fire through its firing point, turns the entire contents of explosive into a powerful mass of fire.

The normal physical condition of the victim, beginning from his soles, was in a good or desirable state. This is quite evident. The burning heat, the pain, the aching, the stabbing sensation, the cramp, the spasm, the convulsion, the numbness and stiffness caused by snake venom, is a later occurrence bringing severe discomfort and distress. This, too, is evident. If the victim be asked he would say that this pain is caused from outside and was not there before. However, this knowledge is crude, superficial. For people do not understand the arising of fresh physical phenomena, they do not know that the earlier healthy physical condition, the old materiality, has decayed. They are quite ignorant of the impermanent nature of material phenomena.

Any fresh feeling or sensation that is noticed in one's body, any arising of pain or disease, all mean fresh origination of physical phenomena, fresh elements, fresh units of materiality, fresh **facts** in the ultimate sense. And all such fresh origination takes place only to replace where the old elements, units of materiality, the old facts, have faded away into nothingness. All this phenomena of instability and cessation should be properly understood as the character of impermanence.

When a hot sensation is felt to arise in any part of the body, or throughout the whole body, it is fresh materiality that has taken birth. Wherever fresh arising occurs the fact of previous matter having decayed should be understood. When the whole body is perceptibly turning hot then one has to understand that the previous materiality, elements, units of physical phenomena, have decayed and vanished. The rate of change from old to new, however, is too swift to be noticeable.

Sometimes we feel cold; sometimes we feel some pain or ache or numbness or stiffness or sprain; sometimes there is itching or irritation – all sorts of unpleasant sensations are felt in our body, now here, now there. Wherever such sensations occur one should perceive that this occurrence signifies dissolution of old materiality,

making it possible for fresh materiality to arise or originate.

It is on account of these extraneous causes of the arising of physical phenomena and their transience which are liable to befall one at any moment, that one is never free from worry. Even in the midst of pleasurable enjoyment of life, there looms this prospect of external causes leading to an abrupt change for undesirable states. The range of mishaps is infinite; people live in constant worry about disease, accidents, enemies, etc., and have to be always on guard against them, never enjoying a really carefree moment. Fences, alarm-signals, watchdogs, sentries, volunteer defence corps, etc., are symbols of a sense of insecurity. Even so, many a time people are obliged to sleep in a hidden spot, travel incognito, so as to fool the would-be enemy. When one contemplates these cares and worries attending us all the time, one should appreciate how burdensome this body is, what a great liability, what evil (*dukkha*).

This is an explanation showing the sudden swift change and corruption of Earth Element which is the basis of the physical body, as illustrated by the Buddha by the poisonous (mouthed) snake, on the analogy of a snake-bite victim, and a bomb.

What is said about Earth Element, by implication, also should be noted as applying to Water Element, Fire Element and Wind Element, the co-existent elements in any unit of materiality.

I shall expand this statement now. Imagine a hard block of lac or wax or tallow the size of man. Expose it to fire thoroughly inside and out. Try to visualise the process of the lump melting away – how the hardness is giving way to softness, from moment to moment. Then imagine the fire being withdrawn from the lump, and try to visualise the reverse process – how the softness is giving way to hardness, from moment to moment. The yielding of hardness, stage by stage till there is no hardness left there, is, in *Abhidhamma* parlance, the deterioration, disintegration and dissolution or decease of (*Pathavī*) Earth Element. The same phenomena has been referred to in various terms in the *Suttanta* and the *Abhidhamma* teachings such as : cessation (*nirodha*), dissolution (*bhaṅga*), diminution (*khayo*), destruction (*vayo*), passing away (*attha*), decease (*maraṇam*), impermanence (*anicca*).

A *yogi* who practises contemplation for insight needs to visualise

the above-said process of deterioration; when he can do so he is possessed of Knowledge of the Three Characteristics (*lakkhaṇatthayaṇāṇa*).

If you have comprehended the impermanent character of Earth Element called the poisonous-mouthed (*Kaṭṭha-mukha*) snake, then you will also comprehend the three other elements – the Putrid-mouthed (*Putimukha*) snake or Water Element, the Fiery-mouthed (*Aggimukha*) snake or Fire Element and the Sword-mouthed (*Satthamukha*) snake or Wind Element. You will understand that these elements, too, are corruptive, decaying and constantly changing.

With Water Element, as it gets stronger the cohesiveness gets stronger stage by stage; and as it gets weaker cohesion gets weaker stage by stage until it disintegrates. These changes illustrate that in *Āpo* is inherent the nature of cessation, dissolution, diminution, destruction, passing away, decease, impermanence.

With Fire Element, as it gets stronger the degree of heat gets stronger stage by stage; and as it gets weaker, heat is replaced by cold, and the cold gets colder or less cold by stages, as the case may be. These changes illustrate that in *Tejo* is inherent the nature of cessation, dissolution, diminution, destruction, passing away, decease, impermanence.

With Wind Element, as it gets stronger the supporting quality and the motive force gets stronger by stages; as it gets weaker, matter becomes flaccid, or lacks movement. These changes illustrate that in *Vayo* is inherent the nature of cessation, dissolution, diminution, destruction, passing away, decease, impermanence.

When a *yogi* clearly comprehends these phenomena he has attained Knowledge in Realizing the Three Characteristics of Existence. Then only is he truly possessed of *Vipassanā* insight or *Viṣpassanā-ñāṇa*. A superficial awareness that death awaits everyone, that decay is inevitable, destruction is inevitable, etc., is not sufficient knowledge, for it is not insight. Hence such commonplace knowledge is not called Knowledge of the Three Characteristics. This kind of banal knowledge is displayed even by people of alien creed.

The above method is the practical method to comprehend the Three Characteristics in the Four Great Elements constituting our body.

The Three Characteristics in the Six Kinds of Consciousness

Of the six kinds of consciousness, Mind-Consciousness is the crucial one. It is also fraught with immense possibilities for misunderstanding with grave consequences, dragging one down to the *niraya* abodes of tortuous existences. So I will begin with it.

Mind-Consciousness

Mind-Consciousness (*manoviññāṇa*) is usually misunderstood as permanent. It is believed to be lying in the heart all the time as a vital force or 'life', having a distinct phenomenon all its own with power to prolong itself. Hence the notions, "I know", "I think", "I muse", "I ponder", etc. All these concepts are grossly mistaken; they bespeak the burning Personality-belief, the Wrong View that is going to drag one down to the *niraya* world at one's death.

Mind-Consciousness has the heart (*hadayavatthu*) as its physical basis. In the heart there is a handful and a half of blood which is continuously agitated like a spring due to the digestive heat (*pācakatejo*) lying below it and the life-preserving heat (*usmā*) that is diffused throughout the whole body. The materiality known as the heart-basis (*hadayavatthu*) as millions of units, floats there in the constantly oozing stream of blood. Mind-Consciousness arises from that material base in a continuous process of flux. As it arises it originally has a dazzling luminosity. This radiant quality of Mind-Consciousness is described by the Buddha in such statements as:

"O *bhikkhus*, this Mind (Consciousness) is shining".

(*Pabhassara-m-idam bhikkhave cittam*);

"O *bhikkhus*, this Mind (Consciousness) is pure white" (*paṇḍaram*).

The lustre of Mind Consciousness is, however, not physically visible. It is to be perceived only. One may try to visualise it with benefit, provided such visualisation helps one to comprehend clearly the arising and the disappearance of phenomena, since this transience of nature has been compared to a flash of lightning:

(*Vijjuppādāva ākāse uppajjanti vayanti ca*).

For better concentration, try and fix your attention on a particular spot in the heart as the blood oozes out in a rising and falling

motion – maybe in the centre, maybe in the front, maybe at the back, maybe on the right side, maybe on the left side. In fact such risings and fallings take place in hundreds of spots in the heart; and wherever it arises it disappears on the spot. This is its nature.

Imagine any sensitive body organ the size of the heart – say, an eye-ball – on which pin pricks are made extensively. Each prick will cause to arise a sensation of pain at the spot where it is pricked; and the painful consciousness and mental aggregates (*nāmakkhandhā*) will disappear right there. In the same manner you should be able to see vividly in the mind the arisings and vanishings of Consciousness and mental aggregates anywhere at the heart-base.

Let us take an illustration : A small bottle is filled with about half a handful of very clear red liquid which can very swiftly destroy anything coming into contact with it. A micro-organism of extremely delicate nature, dazzling white that is born in the liquid by its own nature, now arises here, now there, and makes as if to move violently; but even before the movement can take place it is dissolved in the red liquid and disappears within the blink of an eye. Visualise the continuous appearance of the bacteria, now here, now there, and their instantaneous disappearance. The arising and vanishing of Mind-Consciousness is taking place just like that – mere flashes, or rather, a series of flashes.

The rapidity of the rising and falling is so pronounced that wherever one focuses the mind on the heart-base the whole surface of the clear red blood will be marked by a continuous succession of these arisings and fallings as if in a state of oscillation. The tenacious conventional concept of “I know”, “I think”, etc., holding *viññāṇa* or Mind as one’s own self, must now be readily identifiable with this oscillating phenomenon. If, in spite of such visualisation, the old deluded belief in a lasting soul or self – “I know”, “I think”, – still persists, the knowledge is not real, it is still superficial. Therefore do not let that die-hard belief, the passport to the hellish fires of *niraya*, linger in your thought. When you try and understand the changing phenomenon of mind-consciousness at the heart-base, give your attention also to what has all along been taken for granted as **your** thought. Then (slowly) you will realise that there is none of **your** thought there, in reality.

As taught by the Buddha :

“If one knows that the body is like foam, and the mind a mirage, he escapes the clutches of Death (*maccu*) and attains *Nibhāna*.”

(*Phenūpamaṃ kāyamimaṃ veditvā
Marīcidhammaṃ abhisambuddhāno
chetvāna mārassa papupphakāni
Adassanaṃ maccurājassa gacche.*) *
Dhammapada, V.46

Herein the body is compared to foam to show its unstable and **ephemeral nature**; and the mind to the mirage to show the **delusion** and lack of real substance.

In the hot season before the rains arrive, natural reservoirs lie as wide stretches of parched land with cracks showing everywhere. In the mid-day sun these dry unvegetated stretches, when viewed from a distance, present a shimmering sea not unlike a vast expanse of water. Herds of thirsty deer, numbered by the thousand in search of very scarce water, think of the mirage appearing before them as water and rush for it. But as they get to the scorched bed of the reservoir the imagined water seems still some distance away. They try to get there but there is no water. Then they turn back and see the same phenomenon in the centre of the reservoir. They run back to the centre. The water is not there; it again seems to lie yonder, to where they again rush. In this way there is the endless delusion and the endless search for water where there is no water at all. All perish there in the vain attempt.

This mirage is in fact a product of the slight vapour arising from beneath the earth due to direct sunlight and heat. It is an admixture of the vaporous heat and the sunlight that make it appear to be quivering. It cannot be seen at close quarters. It only appears at a distance where the sunlight has the right role to play on the rising heat. In contemplating Mind-consciousness one has to remember this elusive phenomenon. For the Mind-constituents (*nāmakkhandha*) i.e. *viññāṇa* and the incorporeal factors arise constantly, being inclined to mental objects, and perish as swiftly as the vaporous heat; and they lack substance even as the mirage.

The arising and the perishing must be observed carefully. That

*The last two lines omitted in the original.

they do arise and perish in fleeting succession must be clearly comprehended. That is the essence. Then the character of Impermanence is grasped.

After one has comprehended the transient nature of the six kinds of consciousness as explained above, one should contemplate their dependent-origination. And when the impermanent character is well comprehended, the emptiness, insubstantiality, the not-self character, becomes implicit.

On Eye-consciousness (*Cakkhu viññāṇa*)

Cakkhum ca paṭicca rūpeca upajjati cakkhu-viññāṇam. (Paṭṭhāna)

“On account of visual objects, as also on account of eye-sensitivity, Eye-consciousness arises”.

Herein ‘visual objects’ is the *Abhidhamma* parlance. It is an abstract term. To demonstrate what it means, one has to resort to the eight essential properties of matter that constitute a certain physical unit. “Visual object called man”, “visual object called cow”, “visual object called log”, “visual object called post”, etc., are *Abhidhamma* terms. “I see a man”, “I see a cow”, “I see a log”, “I see a post”, etc., are common usage. Even in the *Abhidhamma* there are certain terms which are coined in concrete terms, like *kahālīkāraāhāra* (lit., a morsel) for material food. Such usage is called (*savattukakathā*) ‘expressions in concrete terms’. When concretised, the meaning becomes clear. So in the *Abhidhamma* there are such concretised terms or *vohārakathā* (common usage) interspersed between abstract terms in the ultimate sense (*paramattha kathā*). For instance in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* we come across such words as rice (*odano*), malt gruel (*kummāso*), meal (*sattu*), fish (*maccho*), meat (*maṇsam*), etc. Material food is compounded of eight essential elements (as in any unit of matter), out of which ‘nutritive essence’ (*oja*) is one. The term *kahālīkāra* is another *Abhidhamma* term for that particular element.

Since concrete terms are more readily understandable I shall use them here. By ‘visual objects’ that are seen occasionally, we mean things that happen to come within sight which have been noticed. From your rising in the morning till going to bed in the evening, things seen may be noted down serially, but the seeing is actually too varied and complex. It is varied because there are just

too many to take count. It is complex because in seeing just one thing – say a man – which part is seen first (his back?), which second (his head?) and so on. It is to cover this infinite range of seeing that ‘visual objects’ are said to be ‘seen occasionally’. The essence here is, in this seeing, or rather process of seeing, *each* object is a case for the arising and vanishing of *each* eye-consciousness, one following the other in rapid succession.

Let me expand on this statement.

As one comes within the seeing range of (say) a log, the image of the log is at once reflected on the eye-sensitivity. In the ultimate reality of things the impact of this image falling on the eye-sensitivity is considerable : it has been compared to the striking of a thunderbolt. Eye-consciousness arises due to this rude shock *i.e.*, as and when the image falls on the eye-base. The phenomenon may be likened to the sparks coming out as steel strikes flint in a lighter. The image disappears every time the eye blinks, and at each disappearance of the image eye-consciousness dies out instantly. It needs no mention that the image disappears when the eye turns away from the object. And when the blink of the eye is completed, and the eye is still fixed on the object, the image strikes again on the eye-sensitivity, causing fresh eye-consciousness to arise. In this way eye-consciousness happens in a series. Take careful note of the fresh arising every time. When the eye turns away from the log to the post the same thing happens : the image of the log disappears and eye-consciousness of the log vanishes; the image of the post appears and eye-consciousness of the post arises. When the eye turns away from the post to some other object, again the same thing happens.

So it should be understood that eye-consciousness arises as and when each visual object is noticed; each consciousness being due to each act of noticing it.

Eye-consciousness can arise only due to the impact of the image falling on eye-sensitivity. Hence, the text mentions, “*on account of visual objects*”. Thus eye-consciousness in seeing a log is caused by the log; eye-consciousness in seeing a post is caused by the post. In other words, eye-consciousness caused by the log makes you see the log; eye-consciousness caused by the post makes you see the post. Let your understanding be clear about it – in all your

acts of seeing.

To take a simile : A certain woman living during a world-period when the human life-span is a hundred-thousand years, is widowed after her first year of marriage; and during her marriageable life of fifty-thousand years she remarries and each time she does so her husband dies after one year only. By each husband she begets a child. In this way she has married fifty-thousand husbands altogether and begotten as many children. Now, when we wish to refer to these fifty-thousand children we cannot identify them with reference to the mother, so we have to refer to the respective fathers – “as Mr. so and so’s child”. Eye-sensitivity is like the mother; visual objects such as log, post, etc., are like the fifty-thousand fathers; each eye-consciousness is like the fifty thousand offspring. That is why the Buddha says : “Through the coincidence of eye and visual object the offspring of evil desire is begotten”.

(Cakkhu rūpeca samvāsā rāgaputtam vijāyati).

Therefore it is quite true to speak of someone seeing the log through the eye-consciousness born of the log; seeing the post through the eye-consciousness born of the post, etc., in respect of everything he may happen to see from the moment of his rising to his retiring for the night.

Take another simile : Someone runs holding a big glass block along a path flanked by young trees, (say) a thousand on either side, about man’s height. As he passes through the trees their images fall *in turn* on the glass block. Eye-sensitivity is like the glass block; the various trees are like the various visual objects; and the images of the trees falling in their turn on the moving glass block are like eye-consciousness. The appearance of the image of each tree causing a specific eye-consciousness, and the disappearance thereof, represent the phenomenon of eye-consciousness.

(End of Eye-consciousness)

The various sounds giving rise to Ear-consciousness; the various smells giving rise to Nose-consciousness; the various tastes that come into the mouth giving rise to Tongue-consciousness; the various tactile objects, both internal and external, that give rise to Body-consciousness – all these phenomena should also be understood on the analogy of Eye-consciousness.

On Mind-consciousness (*Mano-viññāṇa*)

Infinite is the range of mental objects (objects of the mind), or ideas or thoughts. It comprises wholesome or moral (*kusala cittaṃ*), unwholesome or immoral (*akusala cittaṃ*), ineffective or indeterminate (*avyākata cittaṃ*) such as eye-consciousness etc.; unwholesome mental properties such as greed, hatred, delusion, etc.; wholesome and indeterminate mental properties such as faith (*saddhā*), wisdom (*paññā*), mindfulness (*sati*), contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition or will (*cetanā*), one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*), psychic life (*jīvitindriya*), attention (*manasikāra*), the seven common mental properties (*sahba-citta sādhāraṇa*), initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), deciding (*adhimokkha*), effort (*vīriya*), pleasurable interest or joy (*pīti*), desire-to-do (*chanda*), the six particular mental properties (*pakiṇṇakā*), phenomena or elements such as the Four Great Elements (*āpo*), etc., eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, heart-basis, life-force (*jīvita*), nutriment (*āhāra*), birth (*jāti*), ageing (*jarā*), death (*maraṇa*) – termed as *Dhammārammaṇa*, etc. Besides, visual objects, sounds, smells, etc., i.e. the five sensual objects, cannot be known without the functioning of mind-consciousness. Mind-consciousness therefore receives impressions via the five physical senses as well as receiving mental objects. In these six ways the objects of mind-consciousness arise all the time. They belong to the past, the present and the future. The past experiences beginning from the time one is born to the present moment constitute past impressions. All anticipated ideas pertaining to the future, even extending limitlessly into future existences, also work on mind-consciousness. Besides, all second-hand knowledge pertaining to the six senses one has learnt from others also comes within the cognition of mind-consciousness.

Mental conceptions rise and fall incessantly in mind-consciousness. Even while asleep the mind in its passive state, which is the 'life continuum' (*bhavaṅga*), directs its attention to either past *kamma*, the sign of one's past *kamma* or the sign of one's destination or future existence (*gati nimitta*). Throughout the waking hours, from rising to retiring for the night and falling asleep, any one of the six sense objects impresses on mind-

consciousness, each in its turn according to circumstance.

Mind-consciousness takes place in a process. The passive state (*bhavaṅga*) of the mind must receive certain sense impulses through one of the six senses before mind-consciousness arises in the process. The impulse having been received, the mind adverts to it. Then only is it recognised – cognition takes place. On cognition, the thought process carries on : full knowledge of the same occurs, and consequent thoughts based on that knowledge follow.

There is never a break in the reception of sense impressions of one sort or the other at the heart-basis. In fact a horde of them is always present at its door, seeking entry. Hence the series of registering these impressions goes on without a break. These objects of the mind appear and disappear instantly, causing a distinct mind-consciousness which rises and falls every time for each such occasion. This goes on ceaselessly.

‘Ceaseless’ is the word in the worldly sense as the uninformed average person thinks. As a matter of fact, each kind of consciousness takes place only at its respective sense-base; it does not take place in any other part of the body. That is to say, when eye-consciousness takes place the whole mental phenomena occur at the eye only, not anywhere else. The whole mental phenomena, which consists of the four aggregates of mentality (*nāmakkhandhās*) comprising feeling (*vedanākkhandhā*), perception (*saññakkhandhā*), mental formations (*saṅkhārakkhandhā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandhā*), mind or mind-consciousness (*citta*) and the fifty-two mental concomitants (*cetasikās*) rise together and fall together at the eye-base before another kind of consciousness can occur at another sense-base. So when consciousness is occurring at the ear-base it does not occur anywhere else; and the same holds true for all the six sense-bases. When body-consciousness takes place at a certain spot on the body, the whole mental phenomena arise and fall at that particular spot only. When mind-consciousness takes place at the heart-basis the whole mental phenomena arise and fall only at the heart-basis and nowhere else. However, since the mental processes take place in astonishing rapidity, we normally think there is a simultaneous consciousness taking place over the whole

body. Even while one thinks that one is seeing something, the eye-consciousness is being interrupted by mind-consciousness at the heart-basis which can take place innumerable times. So also, if there is occasion, ear-consciousness or other kinds of consciousness can arise. For instance, while seeing a moving car, one hears the sound of its engine, smells the fumes from its exhaust, etc., while the mind is thinking about whose car it is, where it is going, and so on. These are all what people think. The same process applies to the five other senses, it should be understood.

As regards the active comprehension of Mind-consciousness, the same principle holds. Consciousness that conditions bodily action cannot **at the same time** be the consciousness that conditions verbal action. Consciousness that conditions verbal action cannot at the same time be the consciousness that conditions bodily action. However, the rapidity of consciousness is such that the switching off and on of consciousness between bodily and verbal actions is not normally noticed. So we think that while we are walking we can also be talking; or while talking, we can also make bodily movements, as well as we see things or hear sounds. These seemingly simultaneous occurrences in fact are distinct occurrences with their own risings and fallings, only too swift to be noticed. Although this phenomenon of fleeting consciousness (*viññāṇa*) may actually run into millions and millions within the blink of an eye, the practising *yogi* only needs to comprehend all of these occurrences as distinct phases of rising (*udaya*) and falling (*vaya*). The insight into flux is what must be developed. The purpose of insight-development (*vipassanā*) is to have first-hand knowledge to dispel the long-cherished delusion of the belief in a non-existent person or ego, all the time being conscious of I, such as “I see, I hear, I smell, I taste, I touch, I know, I think” – the six kinds of deluded sensual perceptions paving the way to the hellish fires of (*niraya*); as well as, “I speak, I move, I go, I come”, etc., – all symptoms of Stark Ignorance of the Three Characteristics of Existence. By being mindful of the mental and physical phenomena in a flux of states constantly occurring within oneself, and observing them clearly at the six sense-bases of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and heart-basis, one becomes fully aware of when and how they rise and fall. This is what must be aimed at. Once the arisings and

vanishings are clearly seen, from moment to moment, all the infinite actions – bodily, verbal and mental – are covered.

When such insight has been properly developed the ephemeral nature of all material and mental elements – the Four Great Elements of Earth, Water, Wind, Fire; as also the Element of Space, the Element of Consciousness (the Six basic elements) – will be perceived as mere bubbles or foam, impermanent and insubstantial. Their continuous arising and falling from moment to moment will be perceived. Thus the ever-present origination, decay, ageing and death, the essential transitoriness will be perceived. This perception is the Light of Knowledge in Realizing the Three Characteristics of Existence.

On gaining this Light one attains the Path (*magga*) and the Fruitions of the Path (*phala*) along its four stages of development. And since the Path-Knowledge virtually leads to the realization of *Nibhāna*, it is for practical purposes called the Knowledge in Realizing *Nibhāna* (*Nibhāna-paṭivedha-ñāṇa*).

(End of Exposition of the Knowledge in Realizing the Three Characteristics of Existence and the Knowledge in Realizing *Nibhāna*).

The End.

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF

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Aggamāhapāṇḍita, D. Litt.*

Known to scholars of many countries, the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw, *Aggamāhapāṇḍita, D. Litt.*, was perhaps the outstanding Buddhist figure of this age. With the increase in interest in Western lands, there is a great demand for his Buddhist Discourses and writings which are now being translated and reproduced in “The Light of the Dhamma”.¹

Bhikkhu Nyāṇa who was later known as Ledi Sayadaw was born on Tuesday, the 13th Waxing of Nattaw, 1208 Burmese Era (1846 C.E.) at Saing-pyin Village, Dipeyin Township, Shwebo District. His parents were U Tun Tha and Daw Kyone. Early in life he was ordained a *sāmaṇera* and at the age of 20 a Bhikkhu, under the patronage of Salin Sayadaw U Paṇḍicca. He received his monastic education under various teachers and later was trained in Buddhist literature by the Venerable San-kyaung Sayadaw, *Sudassana Dhaja Atulādhīpati Sīripavara Mahādhamma Rājādhirāja-guru* of Mandalay.

He was a bright student. It was said of him: ‘About 2000 students attended the lectures delivered daily by the Ven’ble Sankyaung Sayadaw. One day the Venerable Sayadaw set in Pali 20 questions on *Pāramī* (Perfections) and asked all the students to answer them. None of them except Bhikkhu Nyāṇa could answer those questions satisfactorily. He collected all these answers and when he attained 14 Vassa and while he was still in San-kyaung monastery, he published his first book, ‘*Pāramī Dīpanī*’. (Manual of Perfections).

During the reign of King Theebaw he became a Pāli lecturer at Mahā Jotikārāma monastery in Mandalay. A year after the capture of King Theebaw, i.e. in 1887 C.E. he removed to a place to the north of Monywa Town, where he established a monastery under the name of Ledi-tawya Monastery. He accepted many *bhikkhu*-students from various parts of Burma and imparted Buddhist education to them. In 1897 C.E. he wrote *Paramattha Dīpanī* (Manual of Ultimate Truths) in Pāli.

¹ See Editor’s Foreword.

Later, he toured in many parts of Burma for the purpose of propagating the Buddha Dhamma. In towns and villages he visited he delivered various Discourses on the Dhamma and established Abhidhamma classes and Meditation Centres. He composed Abhidhamma rhymes or Abhidhamma Saṅkhitta and taught them to his Abhidhamma classes. In some of the principal towns he spent a *Vassa* imparting Abhidhamma and Vinaya education to the lay devotees. Some of the Ledi Meditation Centres are still existing and still famous. During his life he wrote many essays, letters, poems and manuals in Burmese. He has written more than 70 manuals,² of which seven have been translated into English and published in 'The Light of the Dhamma',³ *Vipassanā Dīpanī* (Manual of Insight) was translated by his disciple Sayadaw U Nyāṇa, Paṭhamagyaw. *Paṭṭhānuddesa Dīpanī* (A concise exposition of the Buddhist Philosophy of Relations) was originally written in Pāli by the late Ledi Sayadaw and translated by Sayadaw U Nyāṇa. *Niyāma Dīpanī* (Manual of Cosmic Order) was translated by U Nyāṇa and Dr Barua and edited by Mrs Rhys Davids. *Sammādiṭṭhi Dīpanī* (Manual of Right Understanding) and *Catusacca Dīpanī* (Manual of the Four Noble Truths) and *Alin-Kyan* (An Exposition of Five Kinds of Light) translated in part only, were all translated by the Editors of 'The Light of the Dhamma'. *Bodhipakkhiya Dīpanī* (Manual of the Factors Leading to Enlightenment) was translated by U Sein Nyo Tun, I.C.S. (Retd.) and *Maggāṅga Dīpanī* (Manual of the Constituents of the Noble Path) was translated by U Saw Tun Teik, B.A., B.L., and revised and edited by the English Editorial Board of the Union Buddha Sāsana Council.

He was awarded the title of *Aggamahā-paṇḍita* by the Government of India in 1911 C.E. Later, the University of Rangoon conferred on him the degree of D. Litt. (*Honoris Causa*). In the later years he settled down at Pyinmana where he died in 1923 C.E. at the ripe age of 77.

² See Appendix

³ See 'Works by the Same Author', p. vi.

APPENDIX

Below are some of the Ṭikās, Manuals, essays and letters written by the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw.

In Pāli

1. Paramattha Dīpanī (Manual of Ultimate Truths) or Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha Mahā Ṭikā.
2. Nirutti Dīpanī or Vuttimoggalāna Ṭikā.
3. Anu-dīpanī.
4. Vibhatyattha Ṭikā.
5. Vaccavācaka Ṭikā.
6. Sāsanasampatti Dīpanī.
7. Sāsanavipatti Dīpanī.
8. Paṭṭhānuddesa Dīpanī.
9. Sammādiṭṭhi Dīpanī.
10. London Pāli Devī Questions and answers.
11. Exposition of Buddhism for the West.
12. Padhāna Sutta (Pāli and word for word meanings).
13. Anattavibhāvanā.
14. Yamaka Pucchā Visajjanā.
15. Niyāma Dīpanī.
16. Vipassanā Dīpanī.

In Burmese

17. Rūpa Dīpanī (Manual of Material Qualities).
18. Lakkhaṇa Dīpanī (Manual of Characteristics of Existence).
19. Pāramī Dīpanī (Manual of Perfections).
20. Vijjāmagga Dīpanī (Manual of the Way to the Holy-Path-Knowledge).
21. Nibbāna Dīpanī (Manual of Nibbāna).
22. Mahāsayana Dīpanī (Manual of Great Lying Down).
23. Uttama Purisa Dīpanī (Manual of the Real Superman).
24. Paṭiccasamuppāda Dīpanī (Manual of Dependent Origination).
25. Āhāra Dīpanī (Manual of Nutritive Essence).
26. Anatta Dīpanī (Manual of Impersonality).
27. Anatta Dīpanī (New).
28. Kammatṭhāna Dīpanī (Manual of Meditation-subjects).
29. Ānapāna Dīpanī (Manual of Exhaling and Inhaling).

30. Catusacca Dīpanī (Manual of the Four Noble Truths).
31. Bodhidpakkiyā Dīpanī (Manual of the Factors Leading to Enlightenment).
32. Somanassaupekkhā Dīpanī (Manual of Joy and Equanimity).
33. Bhāvanā Dīpanī (Manual of Mental Concentration).
34. Sukumāra Dīpanī.
35. Saccattha Dīpanī.
36. Sāsanadāyajja Dīpanī.
37. Rogantara Dīpanī.
38. Dhamma Dīpanī.
39. Dānādi Dīpanī.
40. Maggaṅga Dīpanī (Manual of the Constituents of the Noble Path).
41. Goṇasurā Dīpanī.
42. Niyāma Dīpanī (Manual of Cosmic Order).
43. Sīlavinicchaya Dīpanī.
44. Virati-sīlavinicchaya Dīpanī.
45. Inaparibhoga-vinicchaya Dīpanī.
46. Dīghāsana-vinicchaya Dīpanī.
47. Asaṅkhāra-Sasaṅkhāra-vinicchaya Dīpanī.
48. Sikkhā-gahana-vinicchaya Dīpanī.
49. Cetīyaṅgaṇa-vinicchaya Dīpanī.
50. Upasampada-vinicchaya Dīpanī.
51. Decision on Ājivatṭhamaka Sīla.
52. Decision on Vikālabhojana-sīkkhāpada.
53. Saraṇa-gamaṇa-vinicchaya Dīpanī.
54. Paramattha Saṅkhitta.
55. Vinaya Saṅkhitta.
56. Sadda Saṅkhitta.
57. 'Alphabets' Saṅkhitta.
58. Prosody Saṅkhitta.
59. Alaṅkā Saṅkhitta.
60. Spelling Saṅkhitta.
61. Paramattha Saṅkhitta.
62. Chapter on Material Qualities (in brief).
63. Nibbāna-visajjanā Manual.
64. Ledi Questions and Answers.
65. Questions on Sotāpanna.

66. Sāsanavisodhanī, Vols. I, II & III.
67. Gambhīra-kabyā-kyan (Manual of Profound Verses).
68. Open letter for abstention from taking beef.
69. Letter of reply to U Ba Bwa, Township Officer of Dedaye saying that he could not go on a pilgrimage to Ceylon that year.
70. Admonitory letter to U Saing, Headman of Saingpyin Village for abstention from taking intoxicants.
71. Admonitory letter to the inhabitants of Dipecyin Township for abstention from taking intoxicants.
72. Admonitory letter prohibiting Lotteries and Gambling.
73. An Advice to hold a Lighting Festival at the Bo Tree within the precincts of Ledi Monastery, Monywa.
74. Letter to U Hmat, a Ruby Merchant of Mogok.
75. Inscription at Sīhataw Pagoda. written by the Ven'ble Mahā-thera Ledi Sayadaw at the request of U Hmat.
76. Epic on Samvega.

